University of Alberta

Youth Culture and the Struggle for Social Space: The Nigerian Video Films

By

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Dedication

To All the Young Men and Women in Nollywood Who Continue to Tell Our Stories of Struggle

and to

Amber Dean, One Friend to Whom I Owe Everything

Abstract

This dissertation reflects on how young people in Nigeria have appropriated global media technology in forging a local cinema industry, popularly known as Nollywood. First begun as a renegade cinematic art by jobless youth in the late 1980s, Nollywood has become the third biggest film industry in the world, next only to America's Hollywood and India's Bollywood, grossing approximately $50 million US dollars annually (Okome 2007a; 2007b). The study thus examines how Nollywood has become a new social space for youth to retell their postcolonial struggles. It examines selected video films, showing how the films both represent the huge social challenges faced by young people in the city and the way youth reinvent those stormy socio-economic and political conditions into moments of possibilities and hope.

Combining both an ethnographic study of the video culture in Nigeria and a textual reading of several video films, the research draws insights from a cross-section of video filmmakers, workers in the arts and culture sectors, and a random survey of the diversity of viewers that make up the video audiences in Nigeria. Theoretically, it extends on the pioneering work on the video film by Haynes and Okome (1997; 2000). Using the theoretical framework of the new sociology of youth (Alan 2007; Bennett and Khan-Harris 2004; Wyn and White 1997; UN 1993; 2005 and Fornas & Goran Bolin 1995) and the anthropological/cultural studies approach by Barber (1997), the project discusses the distinctively creative deployment of the video medium as a narrative genre that narrativizes the different and difficult life struggles of youth in contemporary Nigeria.

I argue that as a new form of cultural expression, Nollywood is Africa's new "Third Cinema" invented by innovative Nigerian youth in remapping the turbulent contours of a troubled postcolony. I demonstrate how creative classes of marginal Nigerian youth have now taken initiative, appropriating and adapting new media technology in reinventing not just their social and economic lives, but also in narrating their social struggles in everyday life for both local and international audiences. The outcome, the study shows, is the emergence of a new social space for youth.

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Introduction

From Optimism to Pessimism: Global Socio-Economic Change, Youth, and the Crisis of Culture

> *In the more desperate structural crisis of the coming decade, the young may turn to the camera and the microphone in order to protest against the economic and social limitations impinging on their lives. They may be appealing to each other or their elders, worldwide, through demonstrations and cultural manifestations for an ethical judgment from what one expert calls an 'all-seeing, all knowing eye of global communication'.* (UNESCO 1981:41)

The concern with young people and their particular activities and social values has been a source of public debate for as long as we can remember. Sociological research indicates that as far back as even the fourteenth-century, young people's attitudes were a cause for social unease in many places all over the world (Aries 1962; Mitterauer 1993; Pearson 1983).[1] But it was not until the mid-twentieth-century that an explosion of youth-centered debates first began to feature prominently both in the public domain and the academic sphere. Indeed, the term "Youth Culture" first found expression in the global social imaginary during this period. First coined and used by the pre-eminent sociologist, Talcott Parson, in his book *The Social System* (1951), Parson deployed the term to refer to emerging forms of counter-cultural movements amongst the working class youth of Post-Second World War Britain and the United States. These new cultural formations by young people, conceived as being marked essentially by irresponsibility, sex and consumerism (Parson 1972),[2] had created a widespread

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[1] Mitterauer's very expansive work, *A History of Youth* (1993) provides insightful inroads into several youth cultures all over Europe and North America going as far back as even the fourteenth-century. Other classical works on the history of youth includes Herbert Moller (1972), Ben-Amos (1994), etc. None of these however cover the history of African youth.

[2] See also Manning and Truzzi (1972)—136-147.

"moral panic" amongst a conservative and prudish adult generation, who now saw young people as "folk devils" threatening the very moral foundations of a stable Western society and its social values (Cohen 2002).[3]

But the real context of these beginnings of the youth culture debate in the 1950s is particularly interesting when contrasted with what we know of the situation of youth today. Post-second World War Britain and America, especially beginning in the late 1940s all through to the late 1960s, were in a stage of phenomenal economic prosperity (UNESCO 1981; Chawla & United Nations 1986; United Nation 1993). The absence from the world market, of major exporters such as Germany, France, Italy, and Japan had led to unprecedented growth in the British and American economy. The broader cultural effect of this dramatic economic prosperity especially for the working classes was that consumerism, which was once an exclusive luxury for wealthier people began to take shape even amongst the poorest groups (Bocock 1993). According to Cohen (2002), those years were a significant moment of social transformation where the basis for social change was facilitated by a potpourri of economic and demographic variables: There was a large unmarried teenage generation (between ages 15-21) whose average real wage had increased at twice the rate of the adults. This relative economic emancipation created a group with few social responsibilities whose stage of development could not be coped with by the nuclear working-class family. (150)

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[3] This book was originally published in 1972 and has been reprinted thrice; 1980, 1987, and 2002. I am using the latest edition.

The direct cultural outcome of the material abundance of the post-war prosperous economy, particularly for young people, was that it brought about teenagers with high cultures of "consumption, style and leisure" (Valentine *et'al.* 4). This laissez-faire life of hedonism and excess materialism was a great contrast to the prudish and supposedly austere lifestyle of the pre-1950s generation. Prosperity, accompanied by consumerism, had thus redefined the new generation of youth from youth-as-innocent people to youth-as-fun. The initial moral panic about young people in the 1950s thus had to do "more with questions of the cultural and attitudinal reflection of this apparent prosperity" (Chawla & United Nations 1986: 9) than with anything else.

The initial prosperous moments that shaped the discourse of youth have shifted dramatically; from a concern with the material abundance as was the case between the late 1940s and 1960s to one of chronic poverty. Since the 1980s, international organizations, scholars, NGOs, religious groups, and political commentators have all been unanimous in noting that the social conditions surrounding the lives of contemporary youth the world over are not only rough but dangerous. The United Nations for instance, through its numerous agencies, emerged with a series of reports on the global situation of the youth and the prognosis for the future of the world's youth which it offers is frightening. [4] In its earlier [1968] report the key markers of youth were "confrontation-contest," "counter-power," "counter-culture," and other such descriptors that designated

[4] The first such report was issued in 1968 at the fifteenth session of UNESCO's General Conference. Another report followed in 1974. I have however not been able to lay hands on extant copies of these earlier reports in the course of my research.

youth at the forefront of the unfolding positive battles against marginalization, especially in the context of the successful de-colonization dynamic all over the Commonwealth (Acland 1995). But the landmarks of the new generation of young people from the 1980s onwards have been the sudden but urgent concerns with "survival," "under-employment," "defensiveness," [and] "anxiety" (UNESCO 17). These trends are evocative of an emerging social turbulence amongst youth at a global scale. In fact, UNESCO's fatalistic prognosis in 1981 was that in comparative terms:

> … if the 1960s challenged certain categories of youth in certain parts of the world with crises of culture, ideas and institutions, the 1980s will confront a new generation with concrete, structural crises of chronic economic uncertainty and even deprivation. (17)

Youth now are not only considered to be endangered—"at risk"—but also "a risk" in itself (Macdonald et al. 1993; Cieslik & Pollock 2002; Wulff 1995).

While there was nothing in the series of reports by the United Nations that located the roots of this anticipated but dreaded upheaval of the post-1980s in young people themselves, some debates have tended to situate the crises of youth within the youth. This predominant "problematising perspective on youth" (Thomson et'al xiii) has typically followed what Wyn Johanna and Rob White (1997) have called a "bio-centric" perspective. Within this social logic, the looming youth crisis is located within the supposedly intrinsic capacities of young people for intransigence as a result of their unique physiological make-up at that phase of biophysical development. These social framings assume that there is a

hypothetical natural progression from infancy, through adolescence/youth, to adulthood, and each of these biophysical phases is supposedly marked by different psychological states externalized in the social character of the young people. Within the purview of this school, what Mills and Blossfeld (2005) call the external "multi-causal" global forces, which have huge implications for the character of young people, are completely ignored. The much feared "global crises" of youth is thus read as an externalization of the innate biophysical state of young people themselves: society is almost totally exonerated.

Emerging research on youth however reveals a surprising irony in this popular perception. New scholarship has begun to make insightful connections between the new global economic order—globalization, late capitalism, postmodernity—and the situation of young people all over the world. These critical studies privilege a discursive shift from the perceived intrinsic capacities of youth for obduracy on the one hand, to the ignored interconnectivity between young people's behavior and global development issues on the other. The central argument here is that the emerging crises of youth beginning in the 1980s are intricately linked to global economic, political, scientific/technological, and cultural trends (UNESCO 1981). In advancing this argument, UNESCO's report traces the beginning of youth concerns two decades earlier, illustrating how the youth of that period were more productively engaged with society owing to the general global optimism that characterized the period. In fact, the report attributes the global emphasis on institutional questioning, public accountability, and the

need for direct honest communication between people as a lasting contribution of that generation of youth to the world (UNESCO 14).

Since the early 1980s the initial optimism of the 1960s has given way, spiraling precipitously into pessimism. The global economic downturns of both the industrialized/developed nations on the one hand, and the developing third world polities on the other, have precipitated huge unemployment rates amongst youth the world over. The cultural consequence has been that the earlier utopias of a global El Derado floated in the 1960s have given way to crass despondency and fear of survival owing to the economic regression of world economies. These unfortunate trends in the global economic domain have now kick-started major global unrest amongst the growing youth population of the world. If the 1960s was a period of counter-culture, confrontation, revolution, and social justice for the youth, the 1980s onwards became a moment of scarcity, unemployment, anxiety, survival, fear, and violence.

This unfortunate trend for the incoming generation of youth beginning from the 1980s onwards mean that the social movements attractive to the youth of this period onwards will not be big ideological pursuits as seen in the prospering 1960s but "movements made up of young people struggling for economic, political, and social rights on a broad front" (UNESCO 22). So in comparative terms, while the concern with young people four decade ago was "a crisis primarily of culture, of ideas, of institutions," the new anxiety about youth has to do with a "more concrete structural crisis that made inflation and unemployment household words, and rules rather than exceptions" (Chawla & United Nations 9).

The process of growing up unarguably has become anchored on other larger development issues such as employment, housing, health, education/training, political participation, and general social integration.

An in-depth analysis of the emerging demographic data of global youth populations also provides significant insights into the current precarious balance of youth in the global scheme of things (See Mills and Hans-Peter Blossfeld 2005, United Nation 1993, Muller 1972, and Musgrove 1972). In 1984 for instance, the global youth population stood at 922 million (Mills and Han-Blossfeld 2005). This was a 79 percent increase from the 1960 figures of 515 million and a 39 percent increase from the 1970 figures, which stood at 661 million. It was projected that these figures would exceed 1,000 million at the end of the 1980s and a foreseeable increase to 1,062 million in the year 2000 and 1, 309 million by 2025 (Chawla & United Nation14).[5] These demographic statistics of the explosion in youth population was, and still is, indicative of the fact that the largest numbers of the global populace likely to suffer most from the effects of the global economic crisis, on account of their vulnerability, are the youth, women, and children, thus reaffirming Herbert Muller's thesis that while "[s]ocial change is not engineered by youth, …it is most manifest in youth" (237).

Against this background, Andy Furlong (2004) concludes that few choices now exist for young people on account of different and fragmented social

[5] The latest UN reports indicate that current population of young people all over the world is approximately 1.2 Billion representing about 25% of the world's total population. Out of this overall population it is estimated that 208 million live in chronic poverty; 130 million are illiterate; 88 million are jobless and about 10 million are infected with diseases such as HIV/Aids and such other needless ailments. It is important to note that 85% of this global population of youth is in the developing world (See UN Report 2003; 2005).

transitions and statuses, which offer little security or satisfaction. According to Furlong, in "many ways being young has become more difficult: the outcome of many pathways are obscure and young people frequently fear economic and social isolation" (134). What we are dealing with here then is not only the sordid picture of "a generation on hold" but also one whose entire futures are actually at stake ((Pomerance & Sakeris 1996; Shaffer 2003). The youth of the modern world now negotiate a "set of risks that impinge on all aspects of their daily lives [and yet] the crises tend to be perceived as individual shortcomings rather than being linked to their locations within class structures" (Furlong 133).

This disquieting scenario demands that we investigate the specific social transcripts of how this dark future is unfolding for different youth all over the world. As Michael Mitterauer (1993) has rightly noted, "youth as a period of maturing towards an autonomous personality presupposes social factors which have not been constant in all social milieus in history" (28). This insight has significant implications for this research because it raises many questions around the specific challenges that young people in postcolonial polities such as Nigeria face. If truly there is variability to the situation of young people owing to specificities of location (space) and circumstances (socio-economic and political contexts), what is the place of the African youth in the gloomy global picture painted by international organizations, youth culture scholars, and other social commentators?

So far very marginal attention has been dedicated to the situation of youth in other parts of the world, especially the postcolonial developing economies of

the third world (Huq 2002).[6] This scholastic trend should not in any way suggest that the youth in these marginalized global spaces are insulated from the universal threats of globalization, post-industrial capitalism and postmodernity as diagnosed by scholars. Rather, if anything, the stakes are higher for younger people in Africa than anywhere else in the world. Recent trends on the continent are indeed pointing to fresh tensions between young people and their respective societies. As Mamadou Douf (2003) puts it, there has now emerged widespread "dramatic irruptions of young people in [both] the public and domestic spheres" (3). Emerging scholarship trickling in now points to how the African youth are negotiating the complex and tenebrous circumstances that now surround the worldwide generation of the young: Thomas Burgess (2005) and others talk of youth and citizenship niches in East Africa; Jean and John Comaroff (1999) discuss growing poverty amongst youth and the rise of "occult economies" in South Africa and elsewhere; Renne Elisha (2000) and others dwell on sexuality and generational identity crises in sub-Saharan Africa; Dominic Thomas (2006) links dramatic shifts in the global economy with the African youth; Alan Dearling and Denis Kigongo (2005) address the challenging educational experiences of youth in Africa; Nantag Jua (2003) discusses the different responses to disappearing transitional pathways in Cameroon; Minou Fuglesang (1994) analyzes female youth culture in Kenya, and many other new researches that we

[6] In a recent publication entitled *Globalizations, Uncertainties and Youth in Society* edited by Hans-Peter Blossfeld et al (2005), none of the essays focused on the plight of African youth within the emerging discourse of "globalization" and its "uncertainties" for young people. This in many ways suggests that the broader academic community is still indifferent to the plight of the African youth.

cannot exhaust here are also beginning to address the particular circumstances of African youth.[7]

Statistical data which reflect the pattern of the global economy since the early 1970s also highlight the compromised situation of the African youth in the new global economic order. The prolonged economic catastrophe of the early 1980s precipitated unprecedented regression in the Gross National Product (GNP) of most developed economies, and the side-effects of the global economic crisis included a collapse in standards of living.[8] But the most important point to be noted is that if global economic recession is troubling for the developed industrial economies of the world, it is even bleaker for the so-called developing world.[9] It is estimated that normally a one percent fall in the growth of the economies of the developed countries appears to produce a 1.5 percent fall in the average growth rate of the developing countries (Chawla & United Nations 25). The report goes further to note that "within these countries, the impact mushrooms as it passes down to the poorest sections of the society" (25). Here then is the stark reality of the implication of the global economic situation on the life of the African youth. Young people are often the major bearers of the persistent economic crisis that

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[7] Two other important studies on the African youth have emerged since this draft was first written. They are *Vandals or Vanguards* (2005) edited by Jon Abbink and Ineke Van Kessel and *Makers or Breakers* (2005) edited by Alcinda Howana and Filip de Boeck. I have cited these materials in other chapters in this study

[8] Almost a year and half after the first draft of this introduction was written, the entire world is now witnessing another economic melt-down never seen before since the great depression of the 1930s. It is too soon to suggest what effect this will have on the global situation of youth, but certainly the effects will be widespread and significant.

[9] Developed market economies as used in this study refer to North America, South and Western Europe (excluding Cyprus, Malta and Yugoslavia), Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Africa. Those in the developing countries category include Latin America and the Caribbean area, Africa (other than South Africa), Asia (excluding Japan) and Cyprus, Malta and Yugoslavia. See pg 5 of the 1986 UN report.

has trailed Africa for the past three decades. This revelation reaffirms Mamadou Diouf's thesis that "the condition of young people in Africa, as well as their future, is heavily influenced by the interaction between local and global pressures" (2).

Taken together, these new research insights might leave one with the impression that contemporary African youth are, as Donal Cruise O'Brien (1996) has argued, "a lost generation." The reports unravel fragmented and distorted life trajectories of young people in different parts of the continent, especially on account of political instabilities, economic stagnation/decline and intractable corruptive practices by the reigning postcolonial political elites. Most of the new scholarship reflects on the socio-political and economic trends unique to sub-Saharan Africa, arguing that the greatest victims of the failed African state are the young adults of the late twentieth-century onwards (International Labour Organization 1988). With phenomenal unemployment, low income, lack of education, insecurity, poor health services and the general collapse of social infrastructures due to mismanaged states pervasively sucked to their knees by a vicious and indifferent postcolonial African political class, the story of the African youth is the story of "the politics of the powerless" (Cruise O' Brien 55). According to Cruise O'Brien, while some African youth "may profit from institutional collapse, [that is] those with a talent for the use of violence, the great majority of young or old would be the losers, truly a lost generation" (71).

I am particularly interested in not only Cruise O'Brien's summation of the current generation of the African youth as a "lost" one, but also fascinated by the

novel and perhaps non-conventional pathways that the African youth are now inventing to cope with states run aground by their elder patriots. These alternative pathways include collusion with the state, recourse to violent criminality, militancy, transnational migration, postmodern cultural resources, neo-Pentecostal faiths, or even self-organized communal work. All these invented pathways by youth support the argument that the masses of young people in the continent are creatively rewriting their biographies in a moment of total institutional failure and indifference to their lives. These diverse cultural formations indicate enormous social disjuncture[s] and point to how youth now "stand at the center of the dynamic imagination of the African social landscape;" how they are "reconfiguring webs of power, [and] reinventing personhood and agency" (Durham 2004, 114).

My particular interest in the dwindling global economic dynamic is the very dire circumstances that it portends for the African youth in comparison to other generations of the young in the world. In more ways than one, the continent has a far greater percentage of the perennial youth problems than UNESCO has identified and studied. The continent's population of youth is growing exponentially; the level of joblessness among young people is sky-rocketing; the rate of mortality is alarming; the gulf between the rural/urban youth is phenomenal; the male/female disparity in education and jobs is on the rise; the tendency towards crime is unsettling, and there continue to be so many other forms of social inequities and fractures. The import of this worsening fiscal and cultural trend is that if UNESCO predicted a vulnerable future for the global

youth of the 21st-century, that of the African youth is even gloomier. This is an important revelation because it calls attention to not only the inequalities of global youth problems, but also the unique challenges of the African youth in the global economic and cultural world order.

It is this socio-economic predicament, especially as it finds expression in the field of popular culture, that I explore in this research. I examine how the global economic order influences what Guy-Lundy Hazoume (1981) has called the "international cultural order"[10] (9). How do the popular African cultural forms which emerged in the early 1990s for instance narrativize some of the specific challenges that the Nigerian (African) youth is grappling with within this vast phase of cruel global scarcities? As cultural texts, what do Nollywood[11] films tell us about local (national) and larger (continental) challenges for young people in Nigeria especially in relation to the perennial problems of youth that recent scholarship has identified? If the Nigerian videos privilege anything about youth struggle in Sub-Saharan Africa, what do they tell us about what the field of culture in the subcontinent can offer the world about the new social challenges that are now facing young people? In other words, how do these popular visual literatures narrate youth, their peculiar postcolonial contexts and the new subjectivities they have begun to develop as responses to dire socio-economic and political circumstances?

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[10] He uses this term to hint at the ways in which each local site of culture production is itself part of a universal culture industry that is highly influenced by both global political and economic factors.

[11] This is now considered to be the third biggest film industry in the world next to only to India's Bollywood and America's Nollywood

My interest in cinematic representation of the Nigerian youth in this study is underscored by the fact that while discourses about youth and their cultures have dominated public discussions in the past five decades and half, "…not nearly as much time and effort has been expended in the examination of how youth are represented by the media" (Shary 3). Although the mass media has remained the key instigator of the moral panic about youth, especially about how youth may defectively understand and thus misuse media images, the image of the youth on screen—whether big or small—and critical debates about such images, have been largely marginal. Where images of youth have appeared, Timothy Shary (2007) argues, those cinematic representations have been "predominantly ethnocentric, concerned about the stories of U.S citizens and only occasionally looking out to foreign lands…" (2). This research thus focuses on recent popular Nigerian video films and what they say about the lives of young people in relation to their immediate society and culture, especially in a postcolonial context. The study's primary objective is to interrogate representations of youth in popular Nigerian video movies in order to see how these representations yield new insights on the postcolonial struggles, concerns and subjectivities of young people in (sub-Saharan) Africa.

My analysis of these issues and their textualization in the video films will demonstrate that the field of culture in Africa is in fact what Pierre Bourdieu (1996) calls "a field of forces" (7). Both as cultural texts and as a creative practice, the Nigerian video films signify bigger socio-economic and political vibrations in the continent. This study demonstrates how the video films, as a

creative invention of the African youth in dark times, not only evince both local and global social change, but also reflect the ways in which the Nigerian (African) youth of the late twentieth-century have felt, conceived, processed, and innovatively reacted to the unstable global socio-economic and political cross-currents [and hence the epigraph in the beginning of the introduction]. At the very heart of this project then is a concern with what David Chaney (2004) calls the "character and delineation of the cultural sphere" (42), but one which focuses specifically on how cultural practices by young people in Nigeria interconnect with socio-economic and political aspects of a particular postcolonial social order.

Between Vulgar Empiricisms and Textual Extremisms: Issues on Methodology

Angela McRobbie (1996) perhaps captures best the quandary that now surrounds the contemporary youth culture researcher. In her essay "Different, Useful, Subjectivities," she observes that there has remained a pervasive tradition of claims and counter-claims between literary/cultural studies on the one hand, and sociology/anthropology on the other, with each discipline laying claim to methodological superiority. This trend has laid the stage for "disciplinary boundary-markings and hostility" commonplace between these fields of study (McRobbie 30). According to McRobbie, sociologists for instance have accused literary/cultural studies of being "excessively concerned with texts and meanings, lacking in methodology and rigour" (30). Literary/cultural studies on the other hand have accused sociologists "as being uninterested in questions which cannot be contained within the existing language of 1970s Marxist/feminist theory"

(McRobbie 30). In other words, as McRobbie notes, while cultural studies "flaunts its wild style," sociology "pride[s] itself on its materialist steadfastness" (30). But in the midst of these disciplinary animosities, youth cultures have continued to flourish, requiring urgent scholarly attention, reading, and untangling by both disciplines. The safe route out of this methodological challenge, McRobbie suggests, is a merger of both the sociological and cultural studies approaches, especially in the context of a modern world dominated by material culture purveyed through the mass media such as TV, film, internet, and several other visual cultures of post-industrial communications industries.

Drawing heavily on Barrett and Phillips (1992), McRobbie recommends that sociological/anthropological research must, in a new moment of the "turn to culture," shift its emphasis from "things," to "processes of symbolization and representation…and attempt to develop a better understanding of subjectivity, the psyche and the self…[that moves] towards a more cultural sensibility of the salience of words." On the other hand, she proposes that literary/cultural studies, in spite of its obsession with abstract signs and symbols, situate its theoretical interests within recognizable ethnographic specificities with all their multi-layered dynamics and implications for cultural mobilization and meaning. The emphasis here then is a new methodological option, which "integrates texts and contexts through the social practices of performance, production, and participation" (McRobbie 34). The youth culture study approach that McRobbie offers then is what she calls an "interactive cultural sociology…which prioritizes multiple levels of experiences, including the ongoing relations which connect everyday life

with cultural forms" (36) and the unique ways in which these connections between contexts, culture, and the individual intermingle in forming "different, useful, subjectivities." A methodological approach that blends aspects of literary/cultural studies with sociological/anthropological approaches will therefore perhaps be best able to make sense of the nagging civic and moral panics about youth.

Eggleston (1978) offers us three research perspectives from which an effective and beneficial youth analysis will emerge. His argument though is not that each of these already explored approaches will be more effective in its independent deployment, but that their combination will lead to a more fruitful youth research strategy. In other words, he recommends a multiplicity of perspectives rather than individual application of distinct research stratagem. The three perspective noted by Eggleston are "the functional," "conflict," and "the interpretative." Functional theories, Eggleston argues, "aim to identify the social roles or functions that various sectors of society perform" (25). In the case of youth, this involves the socialization process and its concern with the adequate preparation of young people for the adult world of work. Citing Rex (1961), Eggleston notes that the conflict theory on the other hand "suggests that consensus is an illusory goal; that social living is the working out of a continuing series of conflicts which may be marked by a transitory truce situation between groups of participants at any time" (29). Applied to youth, the "conflict theory" recognizes the continued gulf between the adult generation and the youth folk in every social setting. Although youth are socialized by adults as a way of getting

them to "function" effectively in society, that process is never entirely devoid of conflict. The "conflict theory" then implies that paying attention to those inherent tensions between adults and youth might be one way of understanding society itself. Very key to the "interpretive theory" on the other hand is the view that "a critical determinant of social behaviour is seen to be the way in which individuals perceive or construct social reality" (33). In the context of youth culture, this suggests the value of a cultural perspective, which recognizes youth action as reaction to specific social experiences. Put differently, as legitimate members of society, youth are always reacting to society and its structures—institutions and systems—hence an understanding of the particular social relations that surround youth within specific social spaces might become key in understanding their actions. Eggleston's argument thus is that studies that combine these three models in their examination of youth culture "are capable of providing effective guidelines to investigations of work with young people" (35).

Emerging youth culture scholarship is beginning to show the combinative approach recommended by McRobbie and Eggleston. Increasingly, there is a tendency towards the amalgamation of both the "material steadfastness" of sociological/anthropological research and the "theoretical" groundings of literary/cultural studies. While being consciously ethnographic in nature, these studies draw heavily on the recent sociological and literary theories of postindustrial modern society in reading contemporary cultures of young people. Using a small youth group in Melbourne, Australia, Kelvin McDonald (1999) for instance demonstrates how youth culture is composed of new "subjectivities"

emerging in response to a postindustrial postmodern world of dysfuntionality rather than one of cohesion and traditional functionality; David Moore (1994) theorizes youth identity with the "skinheads" in Perth, Western Australia; Greg Dimitriadis (2004) deploys both textual and ethnographic approaches to illustrate how "hip-hop" music is mediated and in turn mediates the construction of values, norms and other social experiences of the African American youth in the United States; Jon Stratton (1992) provides significant inroads into the prevailing socio-economic conditions that gave rise to the popular "Bodgies" and "Widgies" youth subcultures in Australia; and Shane Blackman (1995), studying students at Marshland Comprehensive in Britain, illuminates the complicated but symbolic articulations of "positions and oppositions" through purely cultural expressions such as clothes, music, space, movement, and other semiotic cultural codes.

These new scholastic trends have huge implications for my work. While my research is located within the literary/cultural studies domain, it traverses the broad methodological alternatives that are now open to youth culture studies. Although conscious of its traditional literary background and hence deploying relevant theoretical praxis in reading youth culture in the Nigerian video texts, the readings are hinged on or backed by specific socio-economic and cultural contexts. I critique youth culture in the contexts of "after subcultures" (Bennet and Kahn-Harris 2004) where the discourses of youth texts transcend the understanding of youth cultures as passive "rituals" (Hall and Jefferson 1972). In this study I try to comprehend youth culture as pragmatic and rational social activities inserted within specific socio-cultural contexts of postcolonial want,

adaptation, and general economic disjuncture. At the very core of my methodology then is a unique kind of visual anthropology that is undoubtedly grounded in its traditional literary analysis yet driven and underpinned by specific ethnographic insights that help "articulate submerged realities" behind the visual texts (Pink 1).[12] I have thus drawn from personal interviews with the video directors, other published interviews with the directors and producers, historical accounts in newspapers and anthropological studies, scholarly articles on the video films and African cinema generally, and other relevant academic analysis of socio-economic and political trends in Nigeria, Africa, and the wider world in framing my analysis of some of the video films as youth texts.

Thus, combining textual analysis, history and ethnographic insights, I have very broadly demonstrated how the video films, as a popular and emerging cinematic form within a global film culture, have some relationship with the society and culture in which they are produced. In this regard, I have focused chiefly on the subject matter of the Nigerian youth, the specific socio-economic and political circumstances around them, and the unique ways in which they are struggling to deal with those postcolonial challenges in Nigeria. My particular focus on the relationship between the Nigerian video films and the precarious conditions of young people does not in any way presuppose that I uncritically accept the video films as cultural representations that completely reflect social reality in Nigeria in totally unproblematic ways. I am indeed conscious that the video films as cultural artifacts are essentially mediated texts that do not lend

[12] Also see Edwards (2001) for analysis of how visual representations have become central in the research of people's cultures, lives and experiences.

credence to absolute social truths. But I am convinced that in spite of film's aesthetic and stylistic aspects, all films, as James Chapman (2003) has argued, "albeit perhaps some to a greater extent than others, are informed by and respond to the societies in which they were produced" (10). It is in recognition of this ability of film to serve as a social document—its ability to reflect the values, customs, ideas, mentalities and general ways of life of people (Kracauer 1947; Chapman 2003)—that I draw on in showing what popular Nigerian videos tell us about youth and their social struggles.

In chapter one I begin with a conceptual and contextual framework, exploring the very ambivalent nature of the idea of youth and youth culture and hence setting a proper context in which the terms have been deployed in this research. The chapter also offers a historical backdrop to youth and their involvement with culture production in Nigeria, indicating how that cultural dynamic itself intersects with the project of nationhood. The third section of the chapter sign-posts the major cultural shifts that have occurred in Nigeria's field of culture production owing to the democratization of new media technology such as digital video since the 1990s. Here, I have tried to articulate how these social shifts have become a cultural booster for the voices of young people. The chapter ends with a fourth segment that reflects on the implications of the emergence of the video film for postcolonial African cinema and argues that Nollywood is a classic example of Africa's new culture texts—those creative experimental texts concerned not with the tired aesthetics of pioneer culture producers from the

continent but with the conditions and experiences of common people like women, children and youth (Appiah 1991).

Chapters two, three and four mark the beginning of actual textual analysis of selected video films in relation to specific issues and concepts such as postmodernity [chapter two], failed states [chapter three] and sex trafficking [chapter four]. Each of the chapters (except chapter four) examines two films that reflect on different themes but are related to the central subject of the chapter itself. This is followed by the conclusion where I offer a broad analysis about culture, that is, everyday aspects of life, and how its representation in popular media has become the main domain of identity politics for young people.

Generally, I have been very selective in the themes and the video films used for my analysis, ensuring that my choices remain relevant to my main subject matter—youth. My research does not suggest that the video film culture is distinctively a youth phenomenon [for it does take on other social issues not related to youth], nor do I claim to have exhausted all the issues about youth as represented in Nigerian video films. But I have tried, as best possible, to take on a range of issues that I believe provide broad insights into the specific postcolonial conditions of young people in Nigeria and the extraordinary ways in which popular culture tells us something about the way youth are facing up to those challenges.

Chapter One

Conceptual and Contextual Framework: The Ambivalent Notions of Youth and Youth Culture

> *... 'youth' has been an evolving concept, layered upon with values which reflect contemporary moral, political and social concerns. 'Youth' is a social construction with social meanings and it is the task of the sociology of youth to understand how and why these have developed.* (Jones 2009: 1)

The term 'youth' is perhaps one of the most problematic and conceptually evasive concepts in contemporary social science and cultural studies discourse and hence defining it in very absolute terms is difficult if not impossible. The indeterminacy, or rather relativity, of the concept of youth continues to persist because despite the enormous amount of studies and publications on one or more of its aspects, surprisingly very little is known about the term (Matza 88). In fact, even the most canonical texts on youth, which emerged mostly from the acclaimed Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies [hereafter referred to as the CCCS] circuits of the 1970s (see Hall and Jefferson 1977; Mungham and Pearson 1976; Brake 1980), while identifying "youth as a new and sociologically important area of study," also denied that "youth itself was a 'real' social category" (Wallace and Cross 01). This muddiness of the conceptual contours of youth, especially within the past five decades, perhaps derives from the fact that while universally recognizable social parameters such as age, biological changes, economic independence, marriage, political participation, and a whole gamut of other social classificatory categories have been inflected for framing youth hood, these indices are often mediated by specificities of temporality and spatiality. As the mass of critical literature on the history of youth have already shown (Aries

1962; Rosdak 1973; Keniston 1975; Chisholm 1990; Mitteruer 1993) economic circumstances, scientific and technological innovations, variable global cultural trends, and many other countless social changes in different historical periods and places have continued to animate shifting socio-cultural conceptions of the notion of youth.

The groundbreaking historical work of Philip Aries (1962) for instance highlights the very ambivalence of the notion of 'youth.' Aries notes that prior to the nineteenth-century, especially in the middle Ages, the idea of 'youth' as a separate social category never existed in the European social consciousness. Beyond the period of initial dependency, Aries argues, young people were normatively treated as mini-adults with significant social roles in the family and society at large. Kenneth Keniston (1975) corroborates this point when he notes that in most European societies, especially after puberty, "most men and women simply entered into some kind of apprenticeship for the adult world" (04). It was not until the 15th century that youth began to be conceived as a different social segment (Aries 1962).

The preliminary stirrings in industrial capitalism and its prioritization of specialization, later bolstered by the introduction of formal western education, inaugurated the view that children required long periods of training to acquire the requisite skills for the complexity of a demanding and industrializing adult world. This, according to Aries, brought about the social phenomenon of youth. And the subsequent democratization of formal learning enabled the middle classes to entrench the view that "childhood" was a time of dependence and freedom from

the demands of adult life (Proust and James 1990 cited in Valentine etal 1998: 3). Following from these three factors then—capitalism, industrialization, and the democratization of education—the middle classes began to extend the period of training; sometimes, as a way of controlling the working class, and later as a way of positioning the young people of middle class families themselves.

Michael Mitteruer (1993) also provides an expansive socio-historical survey of youth which goes as far back as even the high middle Ages. He argues that the phenomenon of youth is itself a direct product of social, economic and even political circumstances (28). He illustrates his thesis by tracing the remarkable changes that have trailed the physio-biological development of European youth for more than six centuries. He notes for instance that unlike earlier times in Europe, improved standards of living, marked by better feeding and lesser physical work, have engendered the earlier onset of puberty in youth. In contemporary social settings for instance, children in privileged middle class urban settings are more likely to develop faster than those in rural areas. The main argument advanced by Mitterauer thus is that the physical and psychological development of youth is intrinsically and intricately connected to social and historical circumstances. Youth therefore is a concept coloured by multiple social forces that differ temporally and spatially, hence the view that youth "obviously cannot be equated with any particular age range" (Keniston 22). Mitterauer's conclusion thus is that "youth cannot be seen as a period of time with clearly defined starting and finishing point, but rather a phase of many partial transitions" (39). It is perhaps for this reason that Deena (1994) argues that when the term

'youth' is used in contemporary social science cum cultural studies discourse, it is actually in reference to "that province and achievement of select marginalized young people, who must actively establish their claim to it through cultural struggle" (83).

In very broad terms however, youth in contemporary popular imagination has come to refer to that ambiguous interface between childhood and adulthood. The idiom implies that stage of life in the socio-human development when younger social actors accumulate the needed capital—social, economic, cultural, political and even moral—to function appropriately in society as independent adults. According to Wyn and White (1997), youth is often "seen as a separate 'stage' of life because the time of youth is about the preparation for future (real) life—adulthood" (13). In other words, it is the threshold between the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood, which usually (depending on the context) lies between the ages of 14-35. But again, while it is acceptable to see youth as that preparatory phase between childhood and adulthood, a number of studies now show that the factors that shape and colour that transition oscillate depending on specific time and space (Murray 1978; UN 1981, 1986, 1993; Wallace and Cross 1990; Liebau and Chisholm 1993; Wyn and White 1997). Significant divisive social categories such as class, race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and religion feed tremendously into the experiential processes of youth (Acland 1995). In fact, even the way these factors play out in youth development processes vary from one national or regional context to another.

Eisenstadt (1972) has outlined some of the significant social shifts from the twentieth-century onwards that have made the definition of youth problematic. He notes that while there have been archetypal patterns of youth roles throughout history, the post-industrial era with its high emphasis on productivity, profit and general stress on specialized knowledge has brought about a radical shift in the stereotypical patterns of social roles for young people. The acquisition of numerous educational qualifications for instance has meant that youth can take up jobs not according to their age(s) anymore but according to educational certification and professional skills. Youth between the ages of 20-24 can now work in the same industrial complex with older adults (of say 50) and sometimes even as bosses to these adults.

Women also can now take up jobs in the same professional settings with men in spite of stereotypes. These contemporary social trends, with their dislocation of traditional social structure, differ from the forms of age prioritization peculiar to traditional societies where cultural definitions of age "often refer to social division of labor in a society…according to which people occupy various social positions" (Eisenstadt 3). Within this traditional social context, social roles are assigned to people with due regards to age differences. But the major development shifts of the nineteenth-century such as the establishment of nation states, the progress of industrial revolution, the great intercontinental migrations, and now globalization and post-industrialization have all contributed to a diminution of certain traditional roles (Eisenstardst 1972). Social roles are now defined according to the utilitarian value of social skills

based on specialized knowledge and not age. This changing picture of the modern society and its implication for social roles is interesting because it raises questions about how youth now perceive themselves in an atmosphere of increasing detachment from traditional family authority. Is there then a connection between the liberalism of the postmodern postindustrial age and the emergence of modern youth culture? Put differently, can youth culture tell us something about the growing atmosphere of free individualism engendered by intense modernization?

For instance, an 11/12-year-old working class teenager who is compelled by precarious economic conditions into cheap industrial labor in sweatshops cannot justifiably be termed youth anymore because s/he has prematurely assumed adult roles of making money and catering for the immediate family. Conversely, a 40yr old unemployed graduate in Nigeria cannot technically be termed an adult simply on account of age when s/he is not economically independent. These two examples encapsulate the deep conundrum around conceptualizing youth in very clear terms and essentially emblematize the millions of young people out there who, according to Keniston (1975), are "neither psychologically adolescents nor socially adults; they fall into a psychological no- man's-land, a stage of life that lacks any clear definition" (3). Thus, if youth is that period of life when skills and other social potentials are acquired for the adult life, then contexts become paramount; else, as Murray (1978) has argued, we run the risk of lapsing into the pervasive trend where a subject matter that is "highly differentiated" is "being treated as unitary" (09).

The enormous influence that rapid social change has brought on the conception of youth and the relative difference with which most societies conceive of what constitutes youth mean that Universalist approaches or purely biological/scientific parameters are inadequate for defining the concept.[1] According to the United Nations, "youth is not a biological notion, as, for instance, puberty is. It is, rather, a sociological concept: an attitudinal system and a behavioral pattern related to a specific position in society" (United Nations 10). Therefore:

> because the social and economic situation of any one particular society varies from every one historical moment to another, it follows that there will be a commensurate variation, spatial as well as temporal, in that society's conceptions and definitions of youth. (United Nations 7)

While the UN report agrees that youth in very generic terms may refer to that period between the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood, it notes appropriately that in-between this hiatus are countless socio-economic, political, and cultural factors that have huge implications for that transition. So though the typical age range between 15-24 years is becoming increasingly acceptable in determining a country's youth population, it is most often applicable for statistical purposes only (United Nation 1993).

The development of youth as a recognizable social category has also given rise to the notion of youth culture. But in many ways the concept of youth culture

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[1] By Universalist approaches I am referring to the global propensity, especially by preceding generations, to read youth culture as a manifestation of a decaying youth age. Such readings are often completely indifferent to newer socio-economic changes which have huge implications for youth.

is as tricky as the notion of youth itself. It is significant to note that because youth as a separate social category was "constructed as a period of life with few responsibilities and much leisure when a person could indulge in the hedonistic pleasures of consumption" (Straton 1992, 19), the concept was framed around young people's predilection for materialism and frivolous consumerism expressed through fashion, music, dance, and so forth. Thus from the outset youth culture referred to both the conglomeration of the visible social groupings of young people on the one hand and their propensity for the consumption of material goods, on the other (Straton 1992, 21). But while this initial framing of youth culture still persists in the global social imagination, the meaning of youth culture has been expanded beyond the initial benign, symbolic and materialistic understandings of the concept.

Jonathan Epstein (1994) offers an idea of the extended dimension of youth culture rationalizations especially within contemporary intellectual discourses. He notes that the assumptions about the notion of youth subculture are founded on the social conception that there is "a life world;" a unique and specific inhabited space by youth different from the world of the adults. For this reason, youth, according to Epstein, has often been erroneously viewed as being in conflict with acceptable social (supposedly white middle-class) values, norms and expectations. This accounts for why early youth subculture studies in Britain and the United States were primarily concerned with the minority underclass urban youth such as Blacks and Hispanics. This approach then tended to locate youth culture around underclass families with supposedly low values, which these

scholars claimed, often resulted in social pathologies such as violent crimes, drug addiction, sexual immorality, social frivolities, and many other social vices.

But with the emergence of movies such as *Blackboard Jungle* or musical hits by Elvis Presley such as *The Wild One* in the late 1960s, the whole perception of youth culture shifted radically from its location within the underclass to encompass white middle-class youth. Studies in youth subcultures from now on tended to center on both the working class and middle-class youth. American sociologists who were interested in inner city gangs and the problem of poverty, but located all of these within larger social frameworks, inherited this new approach. According to Epstein, youth culture then became understood as a means through which young people generally grant definition to its experience in the public and private world. Epstein thus defines youth culture broadly as "the expressive forms of young people's shared social and material experience" often distinguished by "the distinct values, beliefs, symbols, and actions which certain youth employ to attend to, and cope with, their shared cultural experience" (xiii).

Helena Wulff (1995) proffers an anthropological perspective on youth culture which I consider crucial to this work. Wullf notes that in earlier sociological studies, there was a tendency to rationalize youth as a problem, victim, and resister (02). And of course most of these studies were more concerned with the Western (white) male youth.[2] Wulff however notes that renewed anthropological interest in youth is sustained by Ulf Hannerz's (1992)

[2] Until the mid-1980s very little scholarly work existed about youth of non-Western societies. Current theoretical literatures on youth have begun to call attention to this gap in youth studies. See Rupa Huq, 2006.

notion that people all over the world generally "negotiate culture, or rather cultural processes, and are formed by them to a certain extent." According to Wulff, "when these cultural processes are formed by young people, we are dealing with youth culture" (6). It is from this perspective that she conceptualizes youth as "cultural agents" with capacities for fabricating their own culture, but one located within the interstices of society's larger social frameworks. From this theoretical standpoint, we can begin to recognize and formulate youth culture as forms of social agency, which finds outlets in diverse expressive cultural forms such as music, dance, visual culture such as film, paintings, and even informal oral culture. These cultural platforms become sites where the young people define their social experiences. It is to these sites then that we must turn for any fruitful apprehension of our youth.

Youth cultures as symbolic expressions "occur in various forms in many places and [are] managed according to local circumstances. They may also be national, regional, or put together out of even smaller settings" (Wulff 13). The argument therefore is that youth culture is a universal experience but one that is diversified and highly differentiated. Youth culture is what young people are concerned with and it is defined by place and time. The intellectual thrust here is that while contemporary discourses of youth culture should not ignore the pervasive issues relating to youth such as deviance, adventure and criminality, it must strive to go beyond these recurrent themes and try to understand youth as cultural agents with specific relations to race/ethnicity, sexuality, gender, class,

and many other diverse social forces especially in relation to specificities of time and space.

This perhaps accounts for why Virginia Caputo (1995) has argued that an understanding of youth which recognizes youth as culture agents, and which further focuses on their immediate circumstances, is more likely to be fruitful than the time-honored approach of reading youth always in relation to the adult worldview. She observes that the tendency amongst early scholars, especially developmental psychologists, had always been to read youth in relation to the adult world. In other words, youth are always seen as appendages to their parents—always in relation to their transition from teen hood to adulthood. Very little recognition is given to the immediate thought-world of young people as an independent entity. The implication of these totalizing approach to culture studies, Caputo argues, is that "the spaces of culture wherein the inconsistencies occur, where meanings are contested or alternative ones are articulated are in turn marginalized. These spaces are the social sites of difference according to such factors as gender, race, class, and age" (19).

Bennett Berger's (1972) own radical rereading of youth culture is perhaps the most seminal to the context in which youth culture is conceptualized in this study. Berger challenges normative notions of youth culture, arguing that the theorization of the culture of young people should pay less attention to chronology (that is age) and concentrate rather on what he calls "systems of youthful persons" (176). Re-interrogating Talcott Parson's canonical description

of youth culture as "more or less specifically irresponsible,"[3] Berger argues that this qualification does not in any way streamline youth culture to young persons. Instead, he advocates that youth culture should refer to:

> the normative systems of youthful persons, not necessarily young ones; and … since whatever it is that is normatively distinctive about youth culture is probably not characteristic of all or even most adolescents, it is not attributable solely or even primarily to chronological age; and hence … the definitive characteristics of youth culture are irrelevant to groups other than the age-grade we call adolescent. (176)

Berger makes reference to the earlier studies of Fredrick Elkin and A. William in an essay entitled "The Myth of Adolescent Culture." This study shows that it is indeed not all adolescents that approve of youth culture. They illustrate that some middle-class youth actually conform to expected adult social values by being less hostile and intransigent. Berger's argument then is that this revelation, though conceived as breaking the "myth of youth culture," actually throws a significant sidelight on the "youthfulness" of youth culture. According to Berger:

> [b]y thus implicitly distinguishing the facts of chronological age from the phenomenon of youth culture, they invite us to consider the hypothesis that what we are in the habit of calling youth culture is the creature of some young and some not so young persons. (177)

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[3] See Parson's essay entitled "Age and Sex in the Social Structure of the United States." The essay was originally published in the American Sociological Review, 7 (October 1942): 604-16, but has been highly anthologized. For the most recent version see Manning and Truzzi (1972: 136-147.

The key argument here is that if "irresponsibility," "rebelliousness," and "hedonism" are the key markers that consign youth culture to young persons, it is rather better to rethink this supposition since these features are not the key markers of young persons only. For Berger, "youthfulness," like "fertility" is distributed unequally in society irrespective of age; hence there are youthful and not-so-youthful young men/women and also youthful and not-so-youthful adults.

Berger categorizes four different forms of youth culture—adult youth cultures, bohemian business, show business, and working class occupations.[4] These different categories of youth culture, which clearly straddle chronological (age) categorizations, indicate that what is actually youth culture is a cycle of cultural spin-offs that circulate between disparate age categories and are linked, in one way or another, with the life-paths of either the young or the adult members of society. This insightful rereading of youth culture then implies that "recalcitrance" may truly begin at an early age but that most often, especially in postmodern pluralistic societies, it is not only a "a stage" adolescents go through. Most often, those attributes are internalized and later find expression many years after adolescence in different social forms.

Youth culture thus is not only limited to younger persons, but rather a series of counter-cultural instincts that later mutate into anti-social ideologies

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[4] Adult youth cultures refer to the preservation of certain youth cultures amongst adults while bohemian business is one of those small enterprises "available to person who, having had their basic orientations to the world shaped by experience in an adolescent subculture, have developed trained incapacities for pursuing more conventional kinds of business or professional or 'bourgeois' careers." Show business on the other hand refers to a world 'suffused' by the myth of youth but sometimes dominated by adults. Those include actors, singers, dancers, comedians and other entertainers that cater to youth tastes. Working class cultures on their own are those formations amongst working class adolescents such as high school rebels, flouters of authority and those seeking autonomy from adults (Berger 182-188).

which are mobilized to sustain the disgruntled of society. This reinterpretation of the normative conceptions of youth culture coincides with many of the arguments that I propose in my work. Though my research bears the nomenclature "youth culture," I do not, in the very limited popular perception of that phrase, refer to 'passive' symbolic cultural expressions of 'the young.' I am interested in a specific postcolonial mode of expression, the video films, as expressive texts and a cultural outcome of a stifled environment around a generation of African youth desperate to narrate its challenges to the world—to its indifferent nation, the world beyond its shores and to itself. In doing this they mobilize the "recalcitrant" spirit of both their younger and adult days.

In pursuance of this goal, I depend strongly on the theoretical formulation of the sociology of youth proffered by Manning and Truzzi (1972). While attempting to absolve themselves from authoritatively theorizing what may seem a broad sociology of youth, these authors clearly hypothesize the intersection between the discipline of sociology, youth and broader societal trends. They make the very poignant point that young people, as a recognizable social segment, amongst many other avenues, can best be apprehended through sociological theories. The argument here is that if sociology's aim is to "understand society in a careful, disciplined, and systematic way," the combination of youth and sociology will "draw on the behavior of youth to produce insights into social life in general" (Manning & Marcello 1). The authors note that as a recognizable social category, youth is not "merely a product of biology" but also a "social creation" (3). As social groupings rooted in specific cultural settings, youth are

not only objects of social language, they also evolve a symbolic linguistic code, both verbal and non-verbal, in interpreting their social experiences. It is in reading the deeper meanings behind these communicative forms that we are able to make meaning of both the sources and social implications of such symbolic expressions. The underlying sociological approach here follows Peter Berger's suggestion that the key to wisdom in any sociological analysis is the understanding that "things are not what they seem" (Manning and Truzzi 6). Thus, at the very heart of a true sociology of youth (such as is the case in this study) is the view that there are social texts behind the youth texts.

The true point of significance in Manning and Truzzi's argument is not in its rationalization of the connection between sociology (and even literary/cultural studies) as a discipline on the one hand, and youth as a social category, on the other. Rather, it is in the great insights that they develop about the connections between youth culture and broader social trends—values and norms. A more insightful reading of youth therefore must necessarily pay attention to other crucial social immensities, which according to Peter Becker, "are out of sight" (Manning and Truzzi 6). The proliferation of youth cultures, what Rosdak (1972) calls "the adolescentization of dissent" (48) deserves not only public attention, but critical study, for in a sense it points to one of the few remaining "significant soil" or "social levers" through which general social dissent still finds expression. For Rosdak (1972), the multiplication of youth populations with access to education—one that ultimately may not be useful to them in life—continues to create great disaffection amongst the young in our society. Millions of teenagers

find their way to colleges and universities only to be reminded that society needs technicians and not philosophers. This is what Roszak (1973) calls "bourgeois philistinism" (5). Colleges and universities have also created fertile sites for the intermingling of post-25 year-old youth with 14-24 year-olds, coupled with disgruntled graduate students and junior faculty hobbled between that indeterminate zone of the dreams of a fulfilled life and the crude realities of impending scarcities. Here, the medley turns into a fertile ground for nurturing minds eager to ask social questions. Thus, if in the Marxian dialectic, middle class intellectuals found support in the proletariats for revolt, it is in the youth that the roots of contemporary revolts have found their roots. These trends do not often fail to come with their own abuses, but where else must society turn in seeking the fruits of social dissent from which meaningful social change has been possible for ages? Rosdak's thesis then is that society needs to ignore the "commercial vulgarization" (46) or consumerist sensibilities that are the pest of twentieth-century public culture and rather:

> look for major trends that seem to outlast the current fashion. We should try to find the most articulate public of belief and value the young have made or have given ear to; the thoughtful formulations rather than the off-hand gossip. Above all, we must be willing, in a spirit of critical helpfulness, to sort out what seems valuable and promising in this dissenting culture…" (47)

These ideas are fundamental to my understanding and deployment of the notion of youth culture in this study. I want to begin to read why Nigerian youth behave

the way they do. We want to discern the social factors that animate their counter-cultural inclinations. But most importantly, we want to begin to read all of these concerns through contemporary African urban visual culture such as the video films.

Nation, Nationalism and Youth Culture in Nigeria

In the dozens of current theoretical literatures that already exist on the subject matter of youth generally, the postcolonial youth still remains largely marginal and under-theorized (Huq 2006). Often, within the discursive province that is youth studies, discourses about global youth culture are likely to revolve around North American or European youth and, in some sporadic cases, South American youth. In the same vein, contemporary debates about youth culture are often traced back and located around the British youth cultural movements of the 1950s, and the 1960s student revolts in the US (beginning with students' protests at Berkeley and Columbia in 1964 and 1968 respectively).[5] This discursive oversight should of course be the responsibility of none other than the postcolonial scholar because they, and not outsiders, should bear the onus of chronicling the continent's social history.

A deeper backward glance at the history of youth in Africa, however, shows that the African youth, even before the so-called "golden age of youth," (UN 1986) or what social clinicians now call "the decade of protest" (Clark and

[5] For an insightful understanding of the details of this student revolt see Keniston, Kenneth. *Youth and Dissent: The Rise of New Opposition*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972 and Flacks, Richard. "The Liberated Generation." *Youth in Modern Society*. Eds. Shirley M. Clark and John P. Clark. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972.

Clark 315)—historically marked as the 1960s—had begun to demonstrate activism politically, culturally, and on other social fronts. While pre-1950s youth the world over have been conceived generally as apolitical, inactive, and moderate, the history of youth culture in Africa shows a greater predilection for social activism in all aspects even before its much publicized and theorized contemporaries in the first world.

At the very center of that radiant youth history in Africa is the Nigerian youth. Youth culture, especially of the political hue, dates back as far as the colonial period from the 1930s. The Nigerian Youth Movement, founded in 1936, is a good example in this regard.[6] This youth movement, which began in 1934 as the Lagos Youth Movement, had the aim of protesting what it considered to be the sub-standard quality of education which the colonial government sought to give to the colony. According to Sklar (1964) "from about 1929 to 1934, the political consciousness of the Lagos intelligentsia was stimulated by a controversial government scheme to increase the number of Nigerian technical and medical assistants through vocational education of a sub-professional quality" (48). In the view of the youth movement, this educational scheme had the potential to divert the talents of the rising urban youth population in the colony "from liberal to vocational studies and was objectionable" among many other reasons because most Nigerians "would be confined mainly to inferior jobs under European specialists" (Sklar 48).

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[6] The youth movement had as its pioneer members Dr. J.C. Vaughan, Ernest Okoli, H.O. Davies and Samuel Akinsanya.

The particular significance of the Nigerian Youth Movement at the time was that it was the first such association to attempt to appeal to people across the whole of Nigeria (Lynn 2001, xivi). Because of its expanding membership and avid support from even within the hinterland of the colony the NYM soon trans-mutated into a political party (Post and Jenkins 28); one of the earliest genuine political parties to begin the path to freedom in colonial Nigeria. By referring to the status of the NYM as a political party we infer to a situation in which as an organization the movement deployed its "machinery for competing within a representative system for the support of voters" (Ostheimer 1973). The NYM's emergence, especially with its radical, left-wing, anti-colonial stance, appealed to the rising liberal youth generation at the time and thus was able to wrestle away the "political initiative" from the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) led by Herbert Macaulay (Post and Jenkins 28). By 1938 the movement was so popular it won three representative seats in the legislative council in Lagos.

The popularity of the Nigerian Youth Movement and the political ideology which it came to represent was made possible by the fierce journalistic activism of other youthful voices like Ndamndi Azikiwe (Editor, *The West African Pilot*) and Anthony Enahoro (Editor, *The Comet*). Here is how a Sir G. Whitley, in a memo to a Mr. Hall in August of 1945, described Zik (as Azikiwe came to be known) and his newspaper: "The newspapers controlled by Mr. Azikiwe are the most influential in the territory and are widely read, particularly in Lagos and in the Eastern provinces" (Lynn 2001). So, even the colonial

authorities acknowledged the nationalist activism of the youth movement especially through its excellent media campaigns.

This political activism of youth in early Nigeria was soon to permeate the field of cultural production. The nationalist spirit in the air at the time not only generated a vigorous cultural renaissance but also invigorated a new cultural politics especially amongst the young people. The understanding was that the fight to de-colonize the colony had to be fought on all fronts including the cultural. Not only was there a renewed agitation for the re-traditionalization of contemporary indigenous cultural forms such as theatre and dance, there emerged a frenzied enthusiasm to re-apply these media to nationalist struggles. In her very extraordinary historical study of the making of Nigerian theatre Ebun Clark (1980) notes, "there was a remarkably great interest in the existence and survival of the theatre as a channel providing political as well as cultural education for the masses" (79). The youthful Hubert Ogunde was a great example in this regard. And I must add that this is not to suggest that his was the only theatre at the time, for indeed there had emerged at this historical moment a vibrant cultural ambience with a proliferation of cultural companies of one form or another. But as Ebun Clark (1980) has noted, "Ogunde's theatre was the only one that was politically committed" (81).

Then a police officer, Hubert Ogunde emerged in the Lagos cultural scene in the early 1940s "as the organist and composer of sacred songs for a break-away church from the parent Aladura Movement, the Church of the Lord at Ebute-Metta" (Ogunbiyi 22). His first two plays, *The Garden of Eden* and *The Throne of*

God thus were outcomes of a unique context in which dramatic performances had become central to Christian proselytization in colonial Lagos. But even at this stage the political role that youthful Ogunde was to take on in the ensuing years was foregrounded by his third church play, *Worse than Crime*, whose critique basically was that slavery was "worse than crime." Though beginning from the church, Ogunde was soon to go secular and professional in 1946. With his African Music Research Party,[7] Ogunde, at great risk to himself and the assortment of youthful artists he had mobilized, plunged into the tense nationalist political climate with excellent theatrical performances whose themes revolved around the struggle for self-rule. According to Ogunbiyi, "he retold, sometimes at great risk to himself and his safety, the tragedy, hopes, dreams, [and] triumphs of his time and age" (23). Performances such as *Strike and Hunger* (1945), *Tiger's Empire* (1946), *Towards Liberty* (1947), and *Bread and Bullet* (1950) were supercilious and politically charged productions that not only exposed the devilry and appropriative character of colonial rule, but also demanded outright freedom from the British conquistadors (Clark 83). So from 1945, when Ogunde wrote his first political play, to 1950, he was at the very center of an on-going cultural renaissance and nationalism that "had a direct relationship with the formation and duration of the nationalist movement" (Clark 74). But again, the political theatre of Ogunde was not limited to the nationalist struggle only. His play *Yoruba Ronu* for instance addressed crucial national issues and indeed suggested important political values for the emergent post-independence political elite of the early

[7] This name was to undergo three different revisions and I think each change in name says something about the cultural focus that his theatre took.

1960s who had begun to show early signs of personal quests rather than selfless national pursuits.

The establishment of the pioneer university at Ibadan in 1948 also introduced a new cultural politics by youth. The university, and the subsequent opening of the departments of English and the School of Drama [the latter in 1962] (Dunton 1992) marked a significant cultural turn enacted largely by youth in the country. These departments became the breeding ground for the young people who were to become the new public voices of not just Nigeria but also the continent of Africa. These two departments catalyzed a burst in literary creativity with the "bulk of the bold experiments of those years …initiated by...young men and women" (Ogunba 31). It was hence that a new and politically committed modern literary tradition in Nigeria began. Though many young writers of note were to emerge from that moment,[8] the likes of Wole Soyinka (Africa's pioneer Nobel Prize Winner) and Chinau Achebe are the most pre-eminent of that cohort.

In understanding the cultural politics of these new youthful voices in the national public arena, the specific context of their emergence is important. The pursuit of liberation and the subsequent acquisition of independence brought about the emergence of indigenous political elites who had secured power from the departing colonialists. But early enough it became apparent that this new elite class was more obsessed with the spoils and glitter of their inherited offices than by the general concerns of the mass of people that made up the new Nigerian nation. It was this scenario that defined the literature of the young writers that

[8] See for example Chris Dunton (1992) for an exploration of at least 10 prominent Nigerian contemporary dramatists with significant socio-political commitments.

emerged at that moment. According to Booth (1981), the "betrayal of the new nation by the bourgeoisie [became] a central theme in Nigerian literature" (17). For these young writers, literature, like all art, was in some sense a criticism of life and hence had to address itself to life and respond to a "specific set of political conditions" (Umukoro 09). So for Soyinka for example, the writer's social role was that of "the record(er) of the mores and experiences of his society and the voice of vision in his own time" (21). For most of these young writers literature had become a significant platform through which the younger generation could engage with "the big social and political issues of the contemporary Africa [Nigeria]" (Achebe 78). While deploying multi-dimensional approaches in terms of genres, form, and even content, these youthful writers assumed a new cultural nationalism whose target was no longer the outsider (colonialist) but the very subversive insider whose very frivolous and mindless handling of power was likely to, and has indeed, crippled the hard-earned liberty of the new nations. What we are witnessing here thus is a combative youth culture in which literature challenged indigenous powers; powers that sought to thwart the life of the emerging generation and their respective futures.

Another significant cultural contribution by youth to social change in Nigeria has been in the field of music. As in the field of literature, while there have been many artists in this regard, I will concentrate my analysis on the work of Fela, the Afro-beat maestro whom Sola Olorunyomi (2005) has aptly described as the "bard of the public sphere" (33). From a privileged middle-class, left-wing family of the 1950s, he went abroad with the aim of studying law but turned

rather to music, earning an M.A degree from Trinity College, London. Very much a product of the post-second world war youth cultural activism of the 1950s, Fela was heavily influenced by a myriad of shifting social changes in the 1960s. According to Oloruyomi "…the sixties were years of many unusual social and economic events with their devastating effects on the psyche of conscious black youth like Fela" (22). According to this author, the fierce militancy of the Black Panthers, the invasion of the Bay of Pigs, the assassination of Patrice Lumumba and the crystallization of a fierce pan-Africanist ideology had created a unique and gifted artist who returned to Nigeria to kick-start a cultural revolution.

Fela's counter-cultural style, emblematized in the way he spoke "truth to power;" his public use of drugs such as Indian hemp; and his acute sexual emancipation generated an enormous youth discipleship. He became the "musical warrior" who spoke for the poor masses marginalized by the thieving political elites. Through his "strident political commentaries, rude jokes, parodies and an acerbic sense of humour and satire" (Olorunyomi 26), Fela became the trenchant critic of post-independence political idiocies in Nigeria, especially those enacted by the dictatorial and megalomaniac military. And in many ways he pioneered the narrative of the miasma of city life. His music chronicled complexities and ironies of emerging postcolonial "hostile cities" and its "inhospitable streets" (62), Olorunyomi notes. This lyrical obsession with the city made this artist a favorite of the swelling population of jobless urban youth all over Nigeria who flocked to his "KALAKUTA SHRINE" at Pepple Street, Lagos. His rich musical repertory reflects a vast thematic range from military dictatorship to corruption, from

colonial mentality to neo-imperial manipulations from the west. All these thematic concerns fed into a new youth lexicon invented and nurtured by a frenzied youth population to address a degenerating national polity that was inching decidedly towards self-destruction. Fela's music, and the counter-cultural form it assumed, thus encapsulates a new cultural politics by youth and for youth in an asphyxiating postcolonial context in which the future of the young meant nothing to the ruling elite. Into this national history of cultural activism by young people enters the popular medium of cinema, which began in Nigeria in 1970. Just as Alan Williams (2002) has observed in the case of Europe, the emergence of indigenous Nigerian cinema, like other mass media we have reviewed, became "essential arenas for conflicting interest groups to quarrel over the definition of 'nation'" (4). I will address that cultural dimension in the next segment of this chapter.

In triangulating the connection between youth, culture, and nationalism in Nigeria, we are articulating not only the intersection between cultural and political nationalism, but are also sign-posting how youth stand at the very center of that nexus. We do of course recognize, as Benedict Anderson (1991) has noted, the very "notorious" impreciseness of the term nationalism. But I use the term here in a very restricted sense in referring to a conscious feeling or sentiment attached to a nation. I use the term specifically in the context of patriotism in which the love of one's country supersedes "personal ambition" (During 140). My deployment of nationalism here is not limited to the sense in which, as Timothy Brennan (1990) has noted, it is restricted to such concepts as

'belonging,' 'bordering,' and 'commitment,' but also in the sense in which it is "understood as the institutional uses of fiction in nationalist movements themselves" (47). Quoting James Coleman, Ebun Clark (1980) for example has shown that both political and cultural nationalism are "two aspects of a single phenomenon" (74). Thus our assumption of the interconnectivity between political and cultural nationalism is sustained by the very seminal proposition by Benedict Anderson that "Nationalism has to be understood, by aligning it not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which—as well as against which—it came into being" (Quoted in Bhabha 01). The cultural history of youth activism we have outlined here is thus an illustrative example of how youth and their narratives of nation have continued to change as the nation itself changes. If a nation, as Bhabha acknowledges, is "a continuous narrative of national progress" (01), what we are dealing with here is the particular case in which youth have interrupted the progressive narrative of the Nigerian nation but in a particular manner which Brian Castro, the Chinese Portuguese Australian writer argued, there is "the need for literature [and of course other cultural narratives] to function as dissidence" (Gunew 115). What we are encountering here is the particular case in which youth and their numerous cultural discourses work "to nationalist ends" (During 138). During however extends his argument appropriately noting that "[a]s political structure becomes genuinely more democratic, nationalism shifts into modern popular culture" (149). It is against this background that we turn to our

next segment on youth, popular cultures and the emergence of an alternative discursive social space in Nigeria.

Globalization, Small Media Technologies, and the Rise of Popular Urban Visual Arts: the Emergence of New Youth Spaces in Nigeria

Although the concept of globalization has become the fashionable academic buzzword deployed by scholars concerned with worldwide social change and its consequences, the flurry of scholarly debates forming around this term suggests that its meaning remains uncertain. This conceptual cloudiness implies that globalization is not, as David Held (1998) has argued, "a singular condition nor [even a] linear process" (13). Indeed, the term is often times mobilized in referring to vast, disparate and multidimensional social processes and transformations that are economic, political, technological, environmental and cultural (Croucher 2004). According to James Mittelman (2000), globalization "includes the spatial reorganization of production, the interpenetration of industries across borders, the spread of financial markets, the diffusion of identical consumer goods to distant countries, massive transfers of population within the South as well as from the South to the West, resultant conflict between immigrants and established communities in formerly tight-knit neighborhoods, and emerging world-wide preferences for democracy" (2). Even this multifaceted conceptualization by Mittelman however, does not encapsulate the entire gamut of social processes that have come to be associated with new configurations of the global.

This said, whatever definitions or conceptual frameworks we ascribe to globalization—be it internationalization, liberalization, westernization, Americanization—the linkages it has fostered are not so much the issue because such linkages between people and cultures have been ongoing in different forms and degrees throughout human history. What does require real and urgent critical attention however is what Scholte (2000) has described as the "far reaching transformations in the nature of social spaces" (46) that globalization has occasioned. Such transformations have come about via intensification in the relationships, connections and interdependence between people, cultures, social spaces, nations/governments, and international/local institutions. Moreover, what is fundamentally new about these new global connections is that they are, as Manuel Castells (1999) argues, "tooled by new information and communication technologies that are at the root of new productivity sources, new organizational forms, and the construction of a global economy" (ii). The result has been the radicalization of both local and international experiences of territoriality, which has been triggered by phenomenal advances in science and technology especially transportation and communication technologies. According to Scholte (2000) these developments have in turn brought about "a reconfiguration of geography, so that social space is no longer wholly mapped in terms of territorial spaces, territorial distances, territorial borders" (16). Rather, social space is now marked by heightened forms of social interactivity that have resulted in new cultural formations that were hitherto unknown (Appadurai 1996).

These arguments suggest that cultural globalization is not necessarily about uniformity, singularity, or even linearity. Rather, processes central to cultural globalization entail both homogeneity and heterogeneity; when cultural technologies and global information meet there is, in other words, both integration and collision. In this sense, globalization is not about the universal homogenization and standardization of culture; it is about processes of cultural, technological and economic universalization that unfold through powerful localized inflections (See Appadurai 1996; Arndt 2005; Garcia Canclini 1995; 2001; Cvetkovich 1995; Featherstone 1995; Paulicelli & Clark 2009). While attending to the enormous macro/transnational movement of both people and information in late modern society then, it also remains crucial that localized appropriations and domestications of global technologies and forms of consumer media culture are examined, in particular, for the way they forge new social zones of economic, cultural, technological, and even political life.[9]

It is in this light that this work examines a specific site in which new media cultures and novel subjectivities have begun to develop in sub-Saharan Africa. I focus particular attention on the link between the rise of small media technologies and the crystallization of a new politics of empowered voices and social space for young people in Nigeria. My examination of the growth of video film culture in Nigeria demonstrates how this popular urban visual culture has created what Edward Soja (1996) calls a "thirdspace" for hitherto voiceless and

[9] Appadurai for instance has rationalized these multiple global formations into five different categories—ethnoscapes, technoscaps, financescapes, mediascapes, and ideoscapes. All these new socio-meta-territories refer to specific forms of localized dimensions in access to global finances, media technologies, and the formation of different ideologies arising from those new social spaces.

disempowered youth in the Nigerian postcolony. By *thirdspace,* I am referring to an elastic concept that attempts to capture a complex and contradictory shifting cultural "milieu of ideas, events, appearances, and meanings" (Soja 2). In particular, I am interested in how the democratization of small media technologies has activated new socio-cultural domains of expressivity for a new generation of youthful culture producers in Nigeria who until now were marginalized in the available public spaces of national debate. I am, for the most part, interested in demonstrating how this new dynamic has altered a once exclusive and hegemonic cultural ambience thus inaugurating a new creative class of young Nigerian men and women with the will and cultural resources to express their particular experience of a late modern civilization marked by enormous uncertainties and contradictions.

As a point of entry into this new media territory, I begin with a brief history of media in Nigeria, essentially signposting the major historical shifts that have brought us to the new cultural epoch which I attempt to track in this paper. In revisiting this history, I rehearse in very broad strokes the specific contexts of media culture in Nigeria indicating how the evolution of these media cultures has been especially restrictive as vehicles for expressing youth concerns (for more extensive histories, see Larkin 2008; Ugboajah 1980 & 1985; Agyemang and Stokke 1971). I then signpost the huge cultural shift that emerged in the 1990s, especially with the democratization of information technologies, and demonstrate how that shift has become a cultural boon for youth in the field of culture production in Nigeria.

The Nigerian Media Landscape: Historical Shifts

Nigeria's media history can best be periodized into three broad historical moments—the colonial (1851-1960), post-independence (1960-1970), and the post-oil boom era (1990s onwards) (Larkin 2000). The colonial moment was dominated primarily by imperial censorship and complete occlusion of autochthonous cultural participation in mass media production. This is particularly evident in the beginnings of the print press, the earliest mass media form to emerge in the Nigerian public sphere. The modern history of the Nigerian press is traced to the commencement of an indigenous Yoruba language press in 1859 (Ugboajah 24). According to Sobowale (1985), the first Nigeria newspaper was *Iwe Irohin*, founded by the Reverend Henry Townsend of the Christian Missionary Society (CMS) at Abeokuta. This was later followed by the *Anglo-African*, a newspaper founded in 1863 by a Jamaican printer and journalist in Lagos. Typical of the period, the primary concerns of both *Iwe Irohin* and the Anglo-African were Christian proselytization and the promotion of European business interests (Sobowale 1985). As a media for mass Christian education, colonial governmentality, and imperial business, the missionary press was a crucial instrument of socialization and religious indoctrination. Highly distributed across the Christianized western region of Nigeria, these media outlets in fact had enormous readership amongst the Yoruba populace and hence offered an important forum for advertising and for the popularization of colonial business interests and government policies. The church hierarchy dominated decisions about newspaper content, however and so the input of indigenous peoples was

ignored. This undoubtedly led to the occlusion of indigenous voices in socio-political, economic and cultural discourses. The very location of *Iwe Irohin* within the conservative institution of the church, for instance, foreclosed any possibility for the expression of liberal or alternative views such as those that might be expressed by young people. A vibrant indigenous press did emerge in the 1930s in the nationalistic pursuit of independence, however, that era was short-lived as the proliferating press houses such as the *Western Tribune* and *New Nigeria* became not only politicized but also ethnicized after independence (Dare 1997). The result was again that young people's voices were drowned by either ethnic or nationalistic pursuits.

Early cinema also emerged in Nigeria during the colonial period. But its emergence was also contoured by the same colonialist forces that shaped the print press. Indeed, the very fact that cinema emerged in the context of colonialism meant that its production, distribution, and exhibition were shaped by a colonialist ideology (Okome 1997). As Hyginus Ekwuazi (1991) clearly indicates in his seminal work on the history of film in Nigeria, the entire governing ideology of early cinema in the country can be summarized in a triumvirate agenda: to convince the colonials about the commonalities they shared with the British as compared to Britain's enemies (at the time represented by the Germans); to exhibit to the outside world the outstanding work being done by the imperialists in civilizing the so-called dark continent; and, to encourage self-communal development reflected in the involvement of locals in construction of roads, bridges and so forth. Discernible here is thus the emergence of an institutional

colonial cultural and political apparatus whose main motive was "the hegemonization of its own discourse within the colonies" (Okome, 1997:27). Needless to say there were huge implications for indigenous voices in this cultural dynamic. Most importantly, the imperial hegemonization of cinema meant that local/internal voices were occluded from within the available discursive space opened by the celluloid medium.

The post-independence moment (effectively beginning from the 1960s) was marked by the proliferation of electronic media such as television and radio, alongside print and film. Symptomatic of the period, however, most TV and radio[10] was owned and run by the newly independent state. This new media became symbols of power, pride and civilization for the Postcolonial ruling elite. At the same time, the voices of those not included among the newly emerging power elites were largely ignored in this era of indigenous involvement in media production. New electronic media such as television in fact became the main propaganda machines for the state.[11] The state's obsession with protecting and furthering its interests and policies also meant that very little space was available for alternative voices such as those of youth and women to articulate their concerns. What this history suggests is that even if there were expressions by young people during this era of indigenous participation in electronic media production, those concerns were drowned out by national or ethnically-based political agendas that reflected the interests of those in power. Indeed, even with

[10] Radio transmission began in colonial Nigeria as far back as the 1920s; however, it only gained wide coverage and sophistication from the late 1950s onwards.

[11] Government ownership of the electronic media was justified by the fact that the private commercial press at the time did not grant adequate coverage to dubious government policies and activities. The government thus had to find its own way of accomplishing such tasks.

the rise of private electronic media in the 1990s, much of the institutional censorship which neutered the print press from the late 1970s through the whole of the 1980s was to replicate itself. At root, this is a function of the huge capital costs involved in electronic communication combined with the drive for profit and an awareness of the repressive capabilities of the state. Taken together, these forces have led to the capitulation of privately owned media. As a result, existing private radio and television stations have continuously submitted to the will of successive governments, a practice that has secured huge financial patronage. The implications of these developments for youth have been that very few spaces of direct and independent social dialogue with society through radio and television have been possible.

This in fact has been the case even with the rise of private newspaper companies from the second republic onwards.[12] A combination of economic factors on the one hand, and the deployment of legal and extra-legal forms of censorship by succeeding governments (whether civilian or military) on the other, have unremittingly emasculated the social roles of the private print media (Elegalem 1985; Edeani 1985). As a result what has emerged, as Babatunde Jose observes, is a situation in which "newspapers that had hitherto established reputations for forthrightness and objectivity, peter[ed out] into slavish and almost sycophantic government megaphones" (Cited in Edeani 59). In this compromised situation the independent and critical voices of young people without direct access

[12] The second republic, officially beginning from 1979 to 1983 in Nigeria, generally refers to the second phase of democratically elected government after prolonged military dictatorship beginning in 1966.

to any mass media outlets were undoubtedly marginalized, and this indeed was the case until the early 1990s when small media technologies found their way into the country.

Importantly, the rise of a short-lived indigenous cinema in the 1970s did not make any significant difference to this cultural condition.[13] The inclement economic atmosphere brought about by the global economic recessions from the early 1980s onwards in fact stymied the emerging voices of young culture producers in the cinema sector. According to Haynes (1997) "[t]he disastrous decline of the Nigerian Naira…made the importation of materials and equipment, and foreign processing, astronomically expensive" (Okome and Haynes 1997:01). On account of these financial difficulties, production in 35mm formats ended in the 1970s and has resumed only sporadically since that period. Taken together, then, what we find in Nigeria is a situation in which either the restrictive powers of the state (colonial or postcolonial) or the conservative institutions (such as the church or multinational corporations), combined with the dire economic circumstances of post-independence life, has made the liberal production of culture completely impossible and hence the exclusion of marginal voices of people such as youth, women, and children.

In the 1990s, however, the post-oil boom era has been marked by a social shift in the media dynamic of Nigeria. The discovery of crude oil has meant more national wealth and this newfound wealth has opened up new and vast markets for

[13] Indigenous cinema in Nigeria began with the adaptation of Wole Soyinka's play, *Kongi's Harvest*. The film was of the same title but the entire production was denounced by Soyinka because it over-emphasized the cultural aspects of African culture which was far from the crucial political concerns that the script had taken on. Needless to say of course that this was the direct outcome of external funding for indigenous culture production.

new media technologies especially from Asia. Of late, the huge inflow of small media technologies such as digital video, VCR players, VCD/DVD machines and other portable digital hardware—laptop computers, GSM phones, iPods, and the internet, etc. has inaugurated new production possibilities for once marginalized cultural producers. This in turn has enabled new voices to permeate the media landscape. As a result, a new public sphere, animated primarily by the democratization of media technologies has arisen.

New Media Landscapes: The Cultural Politics of the Creative Class

While information and transportation technologies have fed new forms of cultural globalization, media technologies have also animated different cultural strategies and artistic movements. In doing so, new production styles, genres, aesthetics, subject matters, cultural politics, and even different audiences have taken shape. In the last two decades in Nigeria and beyond this has led to astonishing innovations in the media and communication sectors which have laid the foundation for dramatic upheavals within the global culture industry, providing a basis for what has now come to be known as a "new media order" (Morley and Robins 1995:11). This new order amounts to the radicalization of the international media landscape by novel information technologies which in turn have revolutionized the global cultural domain, raising serious questions not just about the crystallization of new socio-spatial negotiations, but also about new identities and new political possibilities.

Globally we are in fact beginning to witness what Harald Prins (2004) calls the indigenization of global media (516). That is, the development of locally specific forms of media practice invented by culture producers who have adapted and domesticated new media technologies. In the process, they are forging new production practices and socio-cultural and political discourses without necessarily capitulating to the constraints of global/western mainstream canons of culture production (See Stald and Tufte 2002; Wilson and Stewart 2008). These new media practices, Marshal (2004) argue, not only "represent a challenge to cultural politics-as-usual [but also] require a close investigation of the new cultural landscape that has been fostered" (12). In other words, while it is imperative to track, at a global/macro level, how shifting scientific and technological patterns have animated what David P. Marshall (2004) calls "new media cultures," it is also vital to begin to scrutinize the multiple domestications and adaptations of these new media by local culture producers in pursuit of specific socio-economic, political, and cultural ends.

In saying this, the emphasis here is not so much on the *newness* of the *new media* but on the cultural struggles and reconfiguration of social spaces that these new media practices have activated within different national domains, culture industries, and amongst different social segments such as women, youth, indigenous peoples, minorities, and other disempowered people at the margins. Of course as Marshal (2004) has argued, " [A] worthwhile study of new media must develop how the medium conveys, expresses, enables and helps constitute cultural activities and communities. *It cannot presume that technology*

immediately transforms..." (4). [14] As new media cultures emerge, however, new micro-territories with powerful agential forces are beginning to take shape amongst once powerless people living on the edge of society. As Morley and Robin (1995) put it, "in these global times, there are those who desire to 're-territorialize' the media, that is, to re-establish a relationship between media and territory" (18). As such, while globalization has been driven chiefly by what Morley and Robin (1995) have described as "economic and entrepreneurial imperatives" (11), its ramifications in the field of culture production continue to be complex, diverse, and in some instances, transformative.

In Nigeria, for instance, the exceptional technological breakthroughs in mass media communication have begun to change the cultural dynamic for marginalized voices of ethnic minorities, women, and youth. The emergence of small media technologies such as digital videos and music mixing equipment in Nigeria since the 1990s has not only de-institutionalized the media ambience in the country but also made possible new discursive territories where young people are now empowered to insert and assert their concerns within the unfolding discourse of nation in the Nigerian state. Over the past decade and an half Nigeria has witnessed a huge inflow of cheap, portable and efficient digital media technologies from these various countries, including China, Japan, Singapore, and Indonesia. This has enabled greater access to global media technologies and also new possibilities for those cultural producers who have traditionally been excluded from creative production work through state power or even conservative

[14] Emphasis mine

social institutions. What's more, as David Marshall (2004) has argued, the digitalization of various media technologies including visual media have not only "democratized the production process and thereby [opened] the system of film-making to new players;" it has also made it possible to accomplish creative tasks which were once imaginable for those with access to limited media equipment (82).

In Nigeria, this has meant that what Jonathan Haynes (2000) once referred to as the absence of the "visual poetry of cinema" in Nigerian video films is now possible even with small digital video technology. A good film can be shot with digital video and blown up to 16mm or even 35mm, for instance, and yet retain its "visual poetry" or cinematic quality. The work of Tunde Kelani, one of the top directors and producers in the Nigerian video film industry, is a good example in this regard. The cultural leeway occasioned by the digitalization of media has, according to Marshall, "presented possibilities and potentials for film to address some of [the] emergent democratized aspirations around cultural production" (75).[15] The implication of this is that new discursive spaces for social and cultural association are potentially opened for marginalized people. Technological progress makes it possible for youth and other such marginalized social segments such as "women to seize the initiative and occupy new spaces" (Barber 1997a: 8). In Nigeria, this has enabled relatively young people with modest experiences in professional cinema production to go into filmmaking. These young producers are

[15] In a personal interview with Tunde Kelani in Lagos in August of 2008 he explained to the author that for him it is not so much about technology as it is about content. He noted that he is indeed familiar with standard celluloid technology but that it is just convenient and cheap to work with digital video because it transcends that initial inhibitions of inaccessibility to celluloid technology.

mostly products of Nigerian universities with undergraduate degrees either in English, drama and theatre, linguistics, or communication studies. In some cases, the young producers have no training at all and only bring with them a desire to make a living from playing with their imaginations aided by cheap video technology.

In practice this has meant that indigenous film production by home video directors and producers in Nigeria has remained largely artisanal and has gone on under truly appalling infrastructural conditions. Even in this situation, however, the rate of production per week in the Nollywood[16] industry has remained almost a miracle. In spite of the complete lack of lavish studios, editing suits, and other post-production facilities, more than thirty films are officially released by Nollywood creators every week (Okome 2007a; 2007b). Indeed, this phenomenal rate of production is carried out with unimaginably austere budgets. A single digital video camera to the shoulder, two or three high- powered halogen lamps, a laptop computer with movie-maker software, and a bus load of young actors and actresses is enough to complete an average Nigerian movie within a space of two weeks.[17] Other portable digital storage facilities like VCD and DVD plates have now replaced old and bulky VHS tapes. Each completed film is now digitally stored in a VCD or DVD plate and mass distributed across the country and other parts of the world—in some cases grossing between fifty and a hundred thousand

[16] This is now the official name for the Nigerian video industry. It is considered to be the third biggest film industry in the world next to only India's Bollywood and America's Hollywood.
[17] For details of the improvisational and modest means of film production in Nigeria see *This is Nollywood* (2007) and *Nollywood Babylon (2008)*, two documentaries on video film production is Nigeria.

dollars for the young cultural workers.[18] Trailers of these films are often fired off to YouTube where millions of young men and women from all around the country surge everyday seeking information on the latest cultural resources of the 21st century. In fact, there now exists an exclusive cable satellite station where Nigerian video movies are shown twenty-four hours a day, thus attracting patronage not just within the country but from Nigerians within the global Diaspora.[19] So from pre-production to the final product, improvisation is the watchword for the creative class of young film producers in Nigeria. With small media technologies, the young men and women churning out visual representations of modern life and its contradictions in Nigeria do not have to contend with the challenges of state censorship, that of orthodox conservative institutions such as the church, or even the production impediments caused by a general national economic decline. Rather, modern communication technologies have in this sense inaugurated a new cultural space and community, both *imagined* [borrowing Benedict Anderson 1991] and virtual, in which the views of young people about their immediate world can be expressed.

The production possibilities occasioned by small media technology for youth also mean that they can now playfully engage with discourses of nation, citizenship, democracy and postcolonial experience. Often set in the city, most Nigeria video films mirror the really ambivalent contours of postcolonial urbanity in which young people experience both the possibilities and dangers that live side

[18] Under current exchange rates, this would translate to about 5-12 million Nigerian Naira
[19] Actually there are two such stations—African Magic I and II. While the first is dedicated to showing video films from all over the continent, the second is exclusive to Nigerian video films.

by side or around the next corner. Often set in cities like Lagos, Aba, or Kano, young characters are regularly confronted with "a turbulent and dangerous [urban] landscape, where class divisions are extreme but permeable" and where "enormous wealth does not buy insulation from chaos and misery" (Haynes 2007:131).[20] The city then, which is both a context and text for the Nigerian video films, provides subtle but poignant cultural openings for discussing the nation—its failures or successes—and how young people are experiencing and struggling with such social processes.

A film like *Issakaba* (2000 & 2001) is a good example in this regard (See Chapter Three). Reminiscent of the wild American westerns replete with dangerous munitions, blood, magic and adventure, *Issakaba* chronicles "the mind-blowing exploits and rituals of a secret society turned vigilante group" (Gore and Pratten 2003). Released in four parts between 2000 and 2001, and based on the real life story of the "Bakassi Boys", a youth vigilante group that emerged in South-Eastern Nigeria between 1998 and 2000, the film is an eloquent critique of both the failure of the state and how young people are responding to such failure. Amid pervasive crime and state complicity in such criminality, the young men in *Issakaba* are daring youth who have taken a moral high-ground seeking to bring justice "back to town"[21] when the police and other public institutions fail to enforce the rule of law, order and justice. In a very playful but tense way, we not only come to witness what scholars have called "the instrumentalization of disorder" by the ruling elite in Africa, but also the reinvention of violence by a

[20] For more detailed analysis of this argument see my reading of *Maroko* in chapter three
[21] These are the exact words of the youth protagonist in the movie in its epilogue.

new generation of youth desperately seeking to restore order within a chaotic postcolonial setting (See Chabral & Daloz 1999; Mbembe 2000; Gore and Pratten 2003). Enfolded in this film then is not only a potent indictment of the political class for the socio-economic and political breakdown of the nation but also a valorization of the adventures of a despondent youth generation finding solutions, sanity and peace through its own means.

Femi Odigebmi's *Maroko* (2006) provides another example of the power that new media has given young independent culture producers in Nigeria (See chapter three). Set in Lagos, the film retells the story of the working class inhabitants of Maroko who were forcefully evicted by the military government in Lagos state in 1990. In a personal interview with Femi Odugbemi, the director of *Maroko* in Lagos, he told the author that video film practice for him is not so much about cheap entertainment as it is about engaging with those who for years have held the Nigerian nation captive through government policies. Odugbemi is only one amongst many of the numerous Nigerian video directors who now use their art to unravel, reflect on, and question everyday life and how it is connected to the failure of state. And it is significant that new, cheap digital technology is at the very heart of this cultural politics.

Beyond the video film, the link between new media, improved cultural productivity and the rise of new agency and subjectivities amongst young culture producers has been central to the creativity of local popular music. Devoid of big record labels and incredibly starved for finances and the latest recording facilities, young men and women all over the country have independently evolved a

booming local music industry. With small but effective amplification equipment and personal PCs loaded with the latest recording software, mostly downloaded from the internet [in small rooms around sub-urban centres all over the country], young artists are able to independently cut a complete musical album with between six and eight tracks. Included in these emerging albums are intense political critiques of the cycle of abuse left by older generations. Through their music young artists now criticize the political class for the failure of the state, the collapse of the economy, and the absence of basic infrastructure such as electricity, good roads, decent housing, and an efficient healthcare system. They lambast the ruling elites for intransigent corruptive practices and duplicity; they criticize them for the laundering of stolen state funds stashed away in foreign accounts and for many other political and economic failings. The young artists whose albums come to mind immediately are those of 2face Idibia, Olu Maintain aka 'Yahoozee," Daddy Showkie, and other such impassioned young artists. These youthful artists have continued the tradition of Fela Kuti [15th October, 1938 to 3rd August 1997), who during his life as a musician remained a deeply troublesome critic of military dictatorship in Nigeria.

What we are witnessing here then, is the emergence of what Toby Miller (1998) calls "cultural citizenship" in the clearing of a new 'social space,' an independent cultural field mapped out by young people to air their frustrations and angst against an adult cohort that has compromised the future dreams of younger generations. Included in these new cultural meta-territories produced by

youth are new forms of power, agency and subjectivities hitherto unknown to young people within the Nigerian cultural landscape.

Scholars of African culture have begun to demonstrate how popular culture has radicalized public spaces almost everywhere across the continent. Ethnographic studies from all over the continent now indicate how popular culture and everyday life in the form of music (Hofmeyr, Nyaro and Ogude 2003), sports (Rice 2005), television (Barnett 2004; Dolby 2003; 2006), film (Diawara 2003), and other new urban pop cultures are beginning to open new social spaces for people excluded from mainstream cultures, especially those dominated by the state or by global media forces. Popular cultures, it is now argued, not only embody the "true spirit of the people; it is also increasingly intertwined with the public spaces of nations" (Dolby, 2006:32). For Dolby (2006), popular culture in Africa is now the new "site of struggle, a place for the negotiation of race, gender, nation and other identities and for the play of power" (33). And by the popular here I do not in anyway suggest the "high" versus "low" culture binary common in the European analysis of social expressive forms. The array of literature on the subject matter of popular African culture (Barber 1997a; 1997b; Barber and Waterman 1995; Newell 2003; Garret 2003) clearly points to a unique cultural negation or de-centre[ing] of cultural categories based on social stratifications especially between the "high" and the "low". According to Barber (1997a), in Africa "[t]here is a vast domain of cultural production which cannot be classified as either traditional or elite, as oral or literate, as indigenous or western in inspiration, because it straddles both and dissolves these distinctions"

(2). They are cultural productions that mobilize all kinds of available resources in talking about contemporaneous concerns and struggles. According to Barber1997a, these are "the work(s) of local culture producers speaking to local audiences about pressing concerns, experiences and struggles that they share" (02). Popular culture in Africa, Barber argues, is thus thoroughly concerned with the "things that matter" to both its producers and consumers.

While the most canonical theorizations of African popular culture have been somewhat restricted to cultural forms such as theatre, cinema, music, fine arts/painting, and chapbooks (Onitsha market literature mostly), then, critical insights about the Nigerian video film as an emerging popular genre in Nigeria are beginning to emerge (Okome 1999; Okome and Haynes 2000; Haynes 2000; Ogundele 2000; Adejunmobi 2002; Adesokan 2004). Drawing from earlier paradigms of popular Nigerian art such as the Onitsha Market Literature Pamphlets of the 1940-50's, the popular Yoruba traveling theater, and popular juju/fuji music, Okome and Haynes (2000) for instance theorize the Nigerian video as another emergent popular African art. Tracing the scholarships of Emmanuel Obiechina (Onitsha market literature), Barber (popular Yoruba theater), Christopher Waterman (Afro/Juju music), Biodun Jeyifo (traveling theater), and other early scholars of African popular culture, Okome and Haynes demonstrate the similarities between the Nigerian video films and other established popular African traditions. While defining the video film as "a mode of narrative construction in which video technology … is used as the mode of production, storage and exhibition" (Okome 1999), hypothesizes the new genre as

new platforms of public discourse; the zone where the private becomes public; the city becomes both setting and subject; women, children, and youth become recurrent themes, while also embedded with subtle critiques of a failing postcolonial Nigerian state. His analysis therefore suggests that the videos are the most vibrant popular art in Africa today where the city discusses itself thus marking the surfacing of a new and vigorous platform for the discourse of postcolonial nationhood and how it is being experienced, especially by young people.

The cultural outcome of the emergence of the video film as a popular culture form, I will argue, has been the huge growth in new cultural apparatuses mobilized by youth which subvert the cultural ambience in Nigeria, like other places in the postcolony, where for a long time "a relatively few control[led] a largely asymmetrical flow of meanings to a great many more people" (Hannerz, 1997:15). The emergence of the video films, like other cultural movements in music, fashion, television and new media such as the internet create "intense reflexive qualities, telling us how [young] producers as well as consumers see themselves, and the directions in which they want their lives to move" (Hannerz 1997:16). Here we are witnessing the dramatic emergence of young people, through popular urban culture, in both the public and the domestic domains, creating new cultural sites of possibilities, knowledge and power (Stratton 1992: Weinstein 1994; Wulff; Valentine *et'al* 1998). This is what Karin Barber (1997b) hints at when in her analysis of African popular culture she talks about "the

formation…of new kinds of crowds, related, but only obliquely, to a new imaginary of the public emanating from industrial Europe" (348).

If this is exciting, Brian Larkin (2004) has also offered an insightful critical analysis of the cultural phenomenon of the Nigerian video film that is germane to some of the arguments I have broached in this segment. He poses a challenge for a critical rethinking of the ways in which we make sense of media economies in the third world, arguing that when the whole media infrastructure of a nation-state are faulty and also exclude non-mainstream economic participants, it breeds an alternative "shadow economy" of media activities. Larkin's contention is that while it is useful to look at media infrastructures and their positive cultural implication for any national setting, it is also significant to study the failures of such media environments and the resulting outcomes of those failures for alternative media cultures. In his essay "Degraded Images, Distorted Sounds: Nigeria Video Industry and the Infrastructure of Piracy," Larkin thus tracks transnational dimensions in media practices highlighting the ways in which subversive media practices such as piracy have made possible the emergence of what he calls a "black media economy" in northern Nigeria. Elsewhere (Larkin 2000), he also argues that a fuller appreciation of the cultural phenomenon of the video film must be located in a proper context, one in which the democratization of media technologies has enhanced accessibility to cheaper, portable, and yet effective visual technologies, breaking the myth and monopoly that once surrounded earlier technological forms.

In this section of my research therefore I have attempted to demonstrate a specific example of that emerging localized form of the globalizing media order. I have argued that although the democratization of information and communication technologies is an intrinsic part of the globalizing process, the emergence of new small media technologies like the digital video and music mixing resources have reduced the once monopolistic power of the state over ownership and access to mass media forms in postcolonial national settings like Nigeria. The import of this cultural dimension, I have argued, is the widening of the public sphere, where youth, through cheap, portable and yet efficient mass media forms, have begun to clear new spaces where they can engage with society, articulating both their experiences of a tumultuous postcolonial history and their cultural responses to those turbulent times. The new spaces or meta-territories invented by these youth provide ample cultural opportunities where they not only define their social experiences for the public, but also infuse and stamp their own independent subjective positions about contemporaneous conditions of postcolonial life. And in many ways these new cultural dimensions suggest that young people all over the world are not just passive social subjects being acted upon by global social forces. Rather, it can be argued that young people, enabled by new cultural resources especially in the field of communication, have become active social agents, shaping and being shaped by global social change. So while there continues to be the moral panic about young people as victims, of an omniscient global media system, there are enormous social facts that point to the life of

young people as being part of the multi-dimensional historical moment now called globalization, as both subjects and actors fostering change.

Nollywood, Third World Cinema, and the Crisis of Practice and Theory: Youth and the Reinvention of African Cinema

The term Third Cinema was originally fashioned by the youthful and radical Argentine documentary makers, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino (1976) in theorizing the cinematic context, method, and ideological agenda of radical Latin American filmmakers.[22] The duo traced the peculiar ways in which mainstream Hollywood cinema; its industrial structure—production, distribution, exhibition, and even content —constituted a conscious and systematic effort at sustaining a bourgeois/imperialist capitalist ideology that has been key to the repression of Third World peoples.

But in his preface to the book of essays *Questions of Third Cinema,* Jim Pines raises a crucial question that continues to sit sourly at the very center of contemporary Third Cinema discourse. Pines wonders: does the concept of Third Cinema remain relevant "for film and video practitioners working today?"[23] Pines' question above, though raised more than two and the half decades ago, has remained key to some of the most important academic debates about Third Cinema since the mid 1980s. And its recurrence in countless academic discussions marks a huge discursive imperative "to shift the debate to critical

[22]But the essay first appeared in 1969.
[23]This question was originally raised during the African film conference at Edinburgh University, which was held in 1986.

issues and flesh out the somewhat uneasy relationship between critical theory on the one hand, and oppositional film and video practices on the other" (Pines vii). In very simple terms, these kinds of questions reflect the unremitting tension between the uncritical mobilizations of a monolithic Third Cinema theoretical framework on the one hand, and the variable cinematic practices that have continued to emerge from within the marginalized geo-political expression that is the Third World, on the other. Our concern in this study then is to try to reflect on these tensions and to argue that Nigerian youth are now at the very vanguard of a new Third Cinema, forging a practical hinge between what Burton-Carvajal (2006) has referred to as a "cultural-critical divide" between "marginal cinemas and mainstream critical theory" (17). In a sense, I want to argue that the video films represent that needed shift from the earlier colonial political engagements of African cinema to a new postmodern civilization, with its own new challenges and vicissitudes that Africa's cinema culture urgently need to address (See Harrow 2007). And it is young people that are at the forefront of this cinematic renaissance.

I begin with a similar question to the one posed by Pines. What is the precise relevance of the cultural movement of Third Cinema to Nigerian video producers? Or put differently, what is the significance of Third Cinema as a cultural movement to the large pool of young culture producers in Nigeria (Africa) using video and other digital technology today? This question is pertinent because it appears that the video film phenomenon is also enmeshed in the same tension between the practice of African cinema (which situates itself within the

Third Cinema movement) and its theory. Owing to a number of factors which include amongst others a lack of clarity of form[24] and the apolitical character of the video (which situates it athwart the serious cultural politics of African cinema), "at the present, African film criticism and the Nigerian videos are not well suited to each other: the videos are not what is wanted by the criticism, and the criticism lacks many of the tools necessary to make sense of the videos" (Haynes 2000, 13).

The tensions enfolded in the cultural battles Haynes has privileged here are not specific to the video films but part of a broader dynamic of contested postcoloniality amid a thriving global late capitalism. The pre-eminent historian and postcolonial theorist, Dirlik Arif (1994), has argued that the term postcoloniality, if viewed properly, actually refers to the subjectivities of Third World intellectuals who have found their way into the First World capitalist center rather than the real conditions of Third World existence. As those hired to give voice to postcolonial concerns in an unequal global economic and cultural order of neo-liberalism and globalization, the postcolonial intellectual in the imperial centre enjoys the privilege of being a voice of power, first, as an intellectual 'other,' and also, as a representative of minority voices—the autochthonous postcolonial masses whom s/he represents. In other words, as Arif notes, "postcolonial discourse is an expression not so much of agony over identity, as it often appears, but of newfound power" (339). What has thus emerged, he argues, is a prioritization of the subjectivities of the new postcolonial

[24] According to Jonathan Haynes (2000) the video film curiously straddles both television and film, and yet does not fit squarely within either of these genres.

elites rather than the conditions of postcoloniality, which they are supposed to champion. According to Arif:

> [t]here is a parallel between the ascendancy in cultural criticism of the idea of postcoloniality and an emergent consciousness of global capitalism in the 1980s and, second, that the appeals of critical themes in postcolonial criticism have much to do with their resonance with the conceptual needs presented by transformations in global relationships caused by changes within the capitalist world economy. (331)

While fronted as a voice of the repressed, the reality of the postcolonial intellectual is that s/he is indeed snapped up by First World global capitalism as a way of hushing the very strong voices that are supposed to counter the marginalizing tendencies of First World global neo-liberalism. In other words, the postcolonial intellectual, as the minority element in the new global dynamic of what Arif calls "the transnationalization of production," is in a very real sense an accomplice and "beneficiary" of a dangerous global economic system—late capitalism. For Arif then, "postcoloniality is designed to avoid making sense of the current crisis and, in the process, to cover up the origins of postcolonial intellectuals in a global capitalism of which they are not so much victims as beneficiaries" (353).

Arif's arguments are indeed invaluable because they facilitate inroads into the "cultural-critical divide" in contemporary Third Cinema practice and theory. If the very appeal of the postcolonial scholar is in his/her abilities to voice and articulate the "conditions" of postcolonial marginalization (rather than the

subjective individual interests of its intellectuals), why have the peculiar conditions of filmmaking in Africa been ignored for the appeal to the so-called sophisticated aesthetics of First World cinema? The reason, I think, is that the postcolonial film critic(s), especially the African film scholar(s) who hypothetically have the responsibility of theorizing the radical politics of the continent's new culture texts such as the video film, have abandoned it for the academic power required to legitimize their presence at the center of global capitalism represented by First World academia. As Burton-Carvajal (2006) has rightly noted, "[c]ritics of Third World Cinema who operate in a First World context have been motivated by the contradictory impulse to win recognition for their objects of study within the very institutions which also serve to endorse and perpetuate dominant, colonizing, hierarchical cinematic discourses" (20).

The import of this trend for Third World film criticism then has been a certain indifference of mainstream African film criticism to the changing phases of the socio-economic and political conditions which Third Cinema set off to antagonize in the first place. The real agenda or objective of Third Cinema, as Solanas and Getino theorized it, was for Third World filmmaker to subvert this imperialist structure by replacing it with a new aesthetic, one that is indifferent and counter-cultural to Hollywood standards. The distinctive character of Third Cinema, Teshome Gabriel (1982) has clarified, is not the bourgeois aesthetics of First Cinema but its "ties with the social life, ideologies and conflict of the times" (01). The production structure, aesthetics and content of Third Cinema must therefore be one that speaks to the social reality and context of its audience, what

Gabriel refers to as "the dialectics of the traumatic changes which now engulf the Third World" (02).

Third Cinema thus was an "abnormal cinema" aimed at the service of life rather than art. It is an alternative cinema to the first cinema of the imperial center and the auteurist second cinema of Europe. Third Cinema's lasting values then are its insistence on "flexibility, its status as research and experimentation, a cinema forever in need of adaptation to the shifting dynamics at work in social struggle" (Willeman 1989, 10). Intrinsically embedded in Third Cinema, as Solonas was to later clarify, is not so much the genre it assumes, the technology it deploys, or even its obvert political engagement, but its "politics of deconstruction [not the aesthetics of deconstruction]" (Willeman 7). And as Willeman has noted, the very genealogy of Third Cinema shows that it drew its impulses from a number of cultural movements, including Italian Neo-realism, which was really not an explicitly charged revolutionary or political artistic movement (4).[25] This revelation perhaps justifies Robert Stam's arguments that "[r]ather than measure all alternative models against "Third Cinema' as an ideal type, it is more useful…to envision a wide spectrum of alternative practices" (31). Yet, part of what accounts for the continued occlusion of the video genre from the umbrella of African cinema is its commitment to commercialism, populism, and the fracturing of conventional time/space prototypes in Western cinema (Haynes 2000),

[25] Third Cinema began with a conglomeration of radical cinematic movements in the 1960s beginning with the likes of Glauber Rocha's "Aesthetics of Hunger" (1965), Solanas and Getino's "Towards a Third Cinema" (1969), Julio Garcia Espinosa's "For an Imperfect Cinema" (1969) and many others. Today there are approximately forty such cinematic manifestos that make up the Third Cinema Movement.

features which are considered antithetical to the political commitments of African Cinema.

The point must be made however that the gravitation towards commercialism by Nollywood is nothing short of imperative in the present context of culture production in Africa. In spite of the excellent political commitments of African cinema, the works of its producers remain largely unavailable to its audience. As a number of studies have clearly shown (Downing 1987; Diawara 1992; Ukadike 1994; Okome and Haynes 1997; Gugler 2003), African cinema has a long history of colonial manipulations and censorship coupled with the recurrent struggles of culture producers under neo-imperialist African regimes. This repressive history has continued to keep African cinema away from its primary audience, the Africans themselves. And as Bakari (2001) rightly noted, these circumstances "still remain largely unaltered" (04). Thus, to appreciate the quality, themes, and the structure of African cinema in terms of production, distribution, and exhibition is to go beyond the fetishization of an older political aesthetics, and rather, to appreciate the unique socio-economic contexts of African nations and the history of the field of culture in relation to those specific contexts. This is what Alan Williams hint at when he argues that "[w]e must at least situate the question of cinema and nationalism in the contexts of economic relations among states in order to get very far" (11).

Still under the grip of exogenous neo-imperial First World powers and the intractably corrupt political machinations of endogenous African ruling elites, Africa is still at the periphery in the global economic and cultural order. This

continued marginalization of African film, sustained systemically by its exclusion from mainstream capitalist structures such as easy access to funding, distribution and exhibition networks, trouble-free access to modern technology, and other organized chains of late capitalism, has created a nearly impossible situation for culture production, especially that involving huge funding and modern media technology such as cinema. According to Bakari (2001), "the widespread and critical economic circumstances of African nation-states ensure that filmmakers remain collectively disempowered within their respective countries" (04). Completely eclipsed from the thriving global neo-liberal economic and technological world order, how does Africa produce its own culture, its own cinema, whether on celluloid or video?

Undoubtedly, the very conditions that African Cinema, as a variant of Third Cinema, sought to address are far from over. Yet, in Nigeria, as in many other African countries, a ready audience clamoring to "see its own face and cultural avatar" (Okome in Okome and Haynes 92) continues to look to the contemporary film producer, whether of the celluloid or video format, to provide the cultural and moral frameworks to help negotiate the deep labyrinth that is the post-SAP life in the continent. That cultural task cannot be achieved with an overbearing emphasis on the political dimension of the Third Cinema manifesto. As Ngugi Wa Thiongo (2001) has argued, the task is to first of all keep the production of film going in whatever form for its audience. The most important quest, Wathiongo argues, is to give visibility to the invisible continental struggles of the people. For a genuine African film to emerge, Wathiongo argues,

democratization and the freeing of both economic and technological structures central to cinema production is imperative. And if knowledge of a century of the hegemonic grip by Western economic, political and cultural forces is anything to go by, such a challenge is a colossal task that sheer politics of aesthetics will not accomplish. Only a counter-cultural renaissance in production, such as that led by the youthful producers of the Nigerian video film, will likely bring about independent democratization of culture. And it seems likely that while the theorist(s) of African cinema remain indifferent to these huge challenges, the young practicing video film director/producers on the ground, conscious of the enormity of pervasive economic and political constraints against them, have developed unique ways to ensure continued culture production for the purpose of engaging their immediate society in some kind of social discourse, no matter how attenuated direct politics become within such debates. The thriving video film culture in Nigeria, led mostly by young people, is a classic example of the subversive cinematic culture which the duo of Solanas and Getina advocated for the repressed Third World where, as they argued, the filmmaker must produce his own visual images on his own terms, within his own contexts and with content that lucidly speak to his own people.

And while it is interesting that the emergence of this alternative subversive cinema in contemporary Africa is a product of the young—the creative class of the so-called Third World desperate to record its own cultural phases—it is even more fascinating that this youthful cultural movement has found a way of negotiating the treacherous economic challenges that its precursor, African

cinema, has never been able to overcome. Ideologically and aesthetically, African Cinema has been opposed to the commercial, arty, and apolitical production styles of Hollywood. But as Ukadike (2003) has noted, it is indeed a commercial logic that is the driving force of the new video boon in West Africa. That which has driven and sustained the First Cinema of Hollywood, which Third Cinema was (and still is) opposed to, has become the sustaining logic of the new African video films. Thus, while the video cultural phenomenon is located within the ambience of the Third World, it is paradoxically driven purely by the aesthetics of "First cinema," which is essentially capitalist (Ukadike 2003). Ukadike argues, however, that this new video culture does not imply a "displacement" of the politics of African celluloid production. Rather, what is does is "transcend the limitations" of the inability of African cinema to produce on the celluloid format. This is a unique example of an innovative thread of Third Cinema aesthetics, which Robert Stam argues was aimed at "turning strategic weakness into tactical strength" (32). It is a practical cinematic approach to culture production that redefines cruel scarcities into potential enablement wherein, as Ismail Xavier puts it, scarcity "turns into a signifier" (Qtd in Stam 32). So what pioneer African cinema has been unable to do for decades, the video producers have in less than two decades. And the savvy cultural producers at the forefront of this creative cultural innovation are the youth.

Ukadike's thesis ought to be stretched further with the argument that though the innovative production of video films has 'transcended' what seemed impossible for African cinema by gravitating towards commercialism, the

commercialist tendency of the videos do not make them any less political. To argue the opposite would be to ignore the political unconscious embedded within any cultural text—that unique interface or dialectic between politics, economy, and cultural production which cultural theorists like Bourdieu (1993) and Fredrick Jameson (1992) have so well theorized. Here we are hinting at:

> the radical theoretical move of assuming that the relation to the economic is a fundamental element within the cultural element to be analyzed—not in terms of the economic processes within which the cultural object takes form but in the psychic processes which engage in its production and reception. (MacCabe' xi)

For example, while not advertising themselves as explicitly political, how less political or socially *engaged* are the economic and political critiques enfolded in video films such as *Maroko, Living in Bondage, Glamour Girls,* or *Issakaba?* These video films, invented and crafted by urban youth in African cities like Lagos, "name the suffering" (Barber 1997) of the masses by telling the stories of the seamy sides of the daily grind that is postcolonial post-SAP life in Nigeria, Ghana and many other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. These video narratives are both cultural records, what Teshome Gabriel (1989) calls the "[g]uardian of public memory," and social critiques of the distorted map of the socio-economic travails of both young and old people in an emerging postcolonial political economy of want and privation. The very tawdriness of the technology it deploys and the poor technical quality of its narrative are indeed symptomatic of not just the trying social circumstances of culture production but also the precarious

cultural processes of fractured biographies and the decrepit environmental conditions which the video films narrativize. This is what Robert Stam refers to as the "redemption of detritus" where the "artistically developed African culture…now deprived of freedom, education, and material possibilities, manages to tease beauty out of the very guts of deprivation…" (36).

So to ignore this geo-aesthetics of Africa's new culture texts is to be indifferent, or perhaps ignorant, of the ways in which "any film will inevitably reflect on what one might call its place in the global distribution of cultural power" (MacCabe xv). As Anthony Appiah (1991) has convincingly argued, because "postcoloniality has become…a condition of pessimism…its post-, like that of postmodernism, is also a post- that challenges earlier legitimating narratives" (353). So the youthful video producers, like the new postcolonial postmodern African novelists that Appiah talks about, "[are] no longer committed to the [project] of nation." The choice these new cultural producers have made is not "an older traditionalism [Pan-Africanism or Third Cinema], but Africa—the continent and its people" (353). The video films thus can be read as an emerging postcolonial postmodern African popular art expression that has "rejected" and "abandoned" the earlier decolonizing aesthetics of old African cinema to favor a new politics that concerns itself with Africa's "endless misery of the last thirty years" (Appiah 353).

The video films represent a postcolonial postmodern cinema that has cast off the tired legitimizing politics of earlier African cinema. And in this new cinematic project, like the postcolonial postmodern novel, the producers have

chosen "the continent and its people" rather than the modernist aesthetics of pioneer postcolonial African cinema, which the postcolonial African scholar continues to defectively mobilize and front in making sense of popular African cultural expressions such as the video films. For as Okome has eloquently argued:

> ...cinema may strive to make up its quality in order to justify its existence as an art form, but it does not necessarily have to be a technically perfect work of art. To make perfection an important criterion, is to overlook the peculiar cultural, social and economic situations of cinemas at different times and in different nations. (Okome in Okome and Haynes 38)

It seems that the young producers of culture in Africa have come to terms with this practical cultural reality.

Jonathan Haynes (1999) points to how this kind of radical and practical cinematic practice has already begun to crystallize in other places in Africa like the Cameroons and Senegal. Using Jean-Pierre Bekolo's films—*Quartier Mozart* and *Aristotle Plot*—he illustrates how a new grassroots filmmaking practice, unique in form, content, and politics, has begun to materialize. These kinds of cinematic practices, Haynes argues, ignore African film criticism's redundant hold on the ideology of Pan-Africanism and exemplify how youthful African filmmakers have come to terms with the peculiar conditions of African postcoloniality, and thus have reformulated a new cinematic practice that is contemporaneous with its reality. And in many ways Haynes' analysis ties in with emerging scholarships (See Shohat and Stam 1994; Shohat 2000: Wynter 2000) that demands a radical rethinking of African cinema production and its

criticism—one that seeks to reorder the body of knowledge that Western scholarship and cinema practices foster, to build a new one that draws specifically from African realities and episteme. The phenomenon of the video film, led by innovative youth in Nigeria, is a palpable example of the critical Cultural Revolution that these scholars are calling for. So while the video film may not fit squarely into the Third Cinema aesthetics, as we know it originally, it is perhaps time to pay attention to the unique ways in which young culture producers in the continent have begun to rework and triumph over the challenges that African cinema has faced for almost six decades. Such reappraisals perhaps will redefine the ways in which alternative visual cultures such the video films could be apprehended, especially within the broader understandings of the notion of Third Cinema.

In the chapters that follow, I offer textual analysis of selected Nigerian video texts, and through this analysis, highlight the extraordinary ways in which the video films, as Africa's new popular culture texts, reflect some of the social struggles that young people in Nigeria are facing without necessarily capitulating to the stifling creative aesthetics of Western cinema or the Pan-Africanist politics of pioneer African film. I begin with the idea of the postmodern condition and its associated risks for young people. The chapter is divided in three parts, the first being a brief conceptual backdrop to the notion of postmodernity. The second segment examines how the video films aptly demonstrate the postcolonial postmodern cultural dynamic in which youth now mobilize their bodies and other cultural resources such as fashion in the formation of urban identities, especially

in the face of uncertain socio-economic postcolonial conditions. In part three, I take on the evanescent nature of late capitalism's finance capital and show how young people excluded from mainstream economic activities now turn to ritual economies as a means of survival in the postcolonial postmodern Nigerian societies.

Chapter Two

Postmodernity and Youth Culture in *Face of Africa* and *Living in Bondage*

> *Young people are indeed barometers of social change, but they do not simply reflect such change; they actively and consciously partake in it.* (Miles 2000: 14)

Since the late 1980s, an entire industry of critique has begun to crystallize around the whole question of postmodernity, a concept which Anthony Giddens argues is itself a "short- hand term for modern society or industrial civilization" (Pierson and Giddens 94). The frenzied academization of the social condition of postmodernity by social scientists has been animated by the apprehension that late modernity's essential elements embody potentials that drastically redefine the ways in which human beings experience their social environment. As Morch and Anderson (2006) put it, the developmental shift from "the 'early' modern society to the (late-) modernistic society is about the challenge of existence and integration" (66). The peculiar threat of the modern civilization is traceable, as some scholars have argued, to its unprecedented 'speed' and 'flux,' what Zygmunt Bauman (2000; 2005) calls "liquid modernity" and "life."

> The primary characteristics intrinsic to modernity, Giddens notes, are: (1) a certain set of attitudes towards the world, the idea of the world as open to transformation by human intervention *[i.e. through science and technology];* (2) a complex of economic institutions, especially industrial production and market economy; (3) a certain range of political

institutions, including the nation-state and democracy. (Giddens and Pierson 94)

These key features of modernity, all interlinked, are considered to have radicalized the ways in which modern subjects negotiate social existence. It has been noted for instance that the reality of the late modern world is more or less like a tide in which far-flung happenings or events have direct and constant impact or consequences on our personal daily lives. Thus, referring to postindustrial modernity as a "post-traditional order," Giddens (1994) argues that this order "differ[s] from all preceding forms of social order in respect of their dynamism, the degree to which they undercut traditional habits and customs, and their global impact" (1).

Considered as social sciences' "new agenda" (Giddens 1994), an array of social scientists and culture critics have thus begun to theorize on the new condition of what has variously been called post/late or even high modernity, proffering diverse concepts to rationalize the unique ways in which its varied processes of "industrialization, urbanization, secularization, mediazation, etc." (Reimer 128) have all triggered new life-politics for both modern institutions and individuals all over the world. Pierre Bourdieu (1984; 1993) thus dwells on "distinctions," "cultural capital," and "*habitus*"; Michel Foucault (1988) expounds on "technologies of the self"; Anthony Giddens (1991) talks of "self-reflexivity" and "self-identity"; Ulrich Beck (1992) on the notion of "individualization" and "risk society"; Maffesoli (1996) the decline of individualization and the emergence of tribes; Garcia (2001) on the interface

between consumption and citizenships; and so on many other countless post-structuralist and/or post/modernist rationalizations of contemporary industrial and capitalist civilization.[1] All these scholarly efforts are attempts to illuminate the sudden emergence of new life-politics or technologies of identity formation by both institutions and independent individuals in a complex, contradictory, and shifting reality of the postmodern age.

The development of the post-traditional order of late modernity, and the subsequent sociological theories that have developed around it, have also effectuated a huge discursive shift in the sociology of youth. What has emerged, within the broad ambience of youth culture studies especially since the 1990s, is a certain radical pull away from the mid-1970s' pioneer and ground-breaking theoretical work of the CCCS. Drawing heavily on the works of Karl Marx and the Gramscian theory of hegemony, and combining this with a medley of "insights of symbolic interactionism, structural functionalism and semiology," the CCCS critically engaged "with the ways in which the young expressed themselves in opposition to a culture in which their voice was rarely heard" (Miles 2002: 62-3). Undoubtedly, the CCCS, and perhaps other later youth critiques such as the Hebdigian and Cohenite theorizations of the early 1980s, remain a foundational theoretical grid to which later youth culture scholars are indebted. But these theoretical models are said to have been overtaken by the

[1] I need to clarify some terms here. I conceive modernization as a process; modernity as a condition; and modernism or postmodernism as a reaction –an aesthetic response—or attitude of mind towards modernity or its higher variant, late modernity. Thus the binary implied in post/modernity is only to denote the period after "early" modernity, not the reaction to late modernity.

seismic global social changes in contemporary modern economics, politics, and culture especially from the late 1980s onwards.

The obsolescence of the CCCS model has been attributed to its inapplicability in the face of modernity's tremendous social and cultural changes, which of course have had radically different impacts on young people world wide.[2] According to Steven Miles (2002), "could it not, however, equally be the case that the world in which young people live has changed so much that young people currently actively use aspects of youth culture to legitimize dominant power structures [?]" (63). In other words, there is a sense in which the contemporary youth of the postmodern world, however superficially, are actively engaged in "the hegemonic visions of the world, because those visions serve the very purpose of allowing them to survive in a so-called risk society" (Miles 2002, 63).[3] Late modernity, scholars now argue, is one in which there is a sudden "turn to culture" (Chaney 1994; Jameson 1998) wherein dramatic social changes, and the invention of new subjectivities to cope with those shifting social dynamics, are predominantly played out in the cultural sphere. The late modern youth is thus no longer a flaccid social entity passively engaged in oppositional politics with a hegemonic society through what the CCCS saw as cultural rituals of resistance (Hall and Jefferson 1976). In the age of the crucial turn to culture, the late modern

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[2] This is what Rupa Huq (2003) hints at in "Beyond Subculture"; the emergence of a post-sub-cultural theory mill that departs from the initial oppositional cultural politics of youth expounded by the CCCS.

[3] Miles' central argument of course is that the continued problematization of youth transitions as distorted, difficult, and thus problematic continues to perpetuate the very social difficulties which those critiques seek to uncover and challenge. He argues that a productive approach will be to turn to the useful and practical ways through which youth devise cultural alternatives for dealing with the social challenges posed by late modern society.

youth is an active participant, complicit in the invention, appropriation, and interpretation of postmodern cultural resources in the process of negotiating its own place within a society whose volcanic changes are fostering new social formations that inhere new challenges for the lives of both young and old people alike.

Consequently, youth culture studies have begun to mobilize emerging sociological concepts about late/high/post modernity in making sense of contemporary youth cultures (France 2007; McRobbie 1994; Fornas and Bolin 1995; Amit-Talai and Wulff 1995; Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Epstein 1998; Dweyer and Wyn 2001; Heat and Kenyon 2001; Cieslik and Pollock 2002; Mallan and Pearce 2003). Most of these studies on youth and postmodernity have focused not only on the crucial implications of the very great contradictions of our postmodern civilization on contemporary youth, but also on the ways in which youth themselves are responding pro-actively to such phenomenal global social changes.

It has been noted for instance that we are in a thoroughly conflicting age where the normative values taught by adults to our youth are different from what young people experience. Ours is a paradoxical modernity which vacillates absurdly between the profuse abundance of frivolous materialism on the one hand, and genocidal munitions on the other (Rosdak 1973); an age in which trenchant advocates of democracy pay lip-service to the fundamental ideals of freedom and human rights on the one hand, while diligently perpetuating egregious acts of outright human extermination on the other; anew world order in

which our youth spend countless years in colleges only to be reminded by the "bourgeois philistinism" of our capitalist society that it needs far more engineers than philosophers (Rosdak 1972); one in which inequality still predominates our global social experience in spite of the promises of late capitalism and globalization to erode social disparities through privatization, deregulation, and liberalization. Overwhelmed by these great contradictions, our youth seek alternative social avenues for negotiating an illogical modernity, which promises great futures in the midst of an indeterminate and precarious present. What we have begun to witness amongst youth of the late modern society therefore is the invention of new sites of social negotiations in a postmodern world that is adamantly complex, contradictory, and unpredictably oscillatory.

Youth therefore have become a testing ground for contemporary modern sociological theories precisely because "it is during the restless and mobile period of youth that the need and desire to test the new and carve out individual identities is strongest" (Reimer 128). As a state of becoming, youth in the late modern age of rapid social changes have become slippery and indeterminate like late modernity itself (Mallan and Pearce 2003). In other words, as Johan Fornas notes, "youth, culture and modernity impinge on each other" (5). Thus, recent applications of postmodernity to youth cultures have focused on such areas as (1) music (Readhead 1990; Grossberg 1992; Thornton 1995; Frith 1983;1996; Epstein 1994;1998; Bennet 2000; Dimitriadis 2004; Huq 2006); (2) dance (McRobbie 1984;1994; Carinton and Wilson 2002); (3) the body, fashion, and style (Hebdige 1979;1988; Reimer 1995; Pini 2004; Giroux 1998: Miles 2002);

(4) sports (Murphy 1984; Murphy et el 1988; 1990; Redhead 1987; 1993); (5) film and television (Kaplan 1987; Fiske 1986;1989; Jagodzinski 2008), and several other cultural texts. Underlying these theorizations is the logic that the social phase of youth, as a project of the future, is pretty much aligned to modernity in its futurity, dynamism, contradictions, complexities, and radicalism. So the very idea of youth itself is one so profoundly embedded in modernist tenets that the two become inseparable. The discursive imperative then is the need to interrogate the new cultural spaces occupied by youth in the late modern world by examining textual representations "produced for them, about them, and, sometimes, by them" (Mallan and Pearce x). For as Steven Miles (2000) has noted, "[I]t is all well and good to point out that the world is changing and that young people are changing with it, but what form does the link between the young people and social change actually take?" (66)

In what follows, I propose to deploy some of the recent sociological concepts about postmodernity in reading a three part Nigerian video film entitled *Face of Africa*.[4] In doing this, I do not mean to suggest that current western conceptual framings of postmodernity equally apply to Africa's postcolonial modernity in very absolute terms and in every respect. Instead, as (Wittrock 2000) has argued, I perceive the cultural programme of modernity as a "global condition". While the initial historical processes that animated the project of modernity [and now postmodernity] are traceable to the West, the varied contextual changes it has undergone since its commencement suggest that

[4] *Face of Africa I-III.* Dir: Obby Callys Obinali. VCD (240 Min.). Sylvester Obadigie Film, 2005.

"Western patterns of modernity are not the only 'authentic' modernities, though they enjoy historical precedence and continue to be a basic reference point for others" (Eisenstadt 2000:3). Indeed, rather than one [Western] modernity, scholars argue that what we do have is multiple, plural or global modernities (Eisenstandt 2000; Wittrock 2000; Featherstone, Lash and Robertson (1995). Eisenstadt (2000) for example has observed that although the notion of "human agency, and its place in the flow of time" (3), and the radical alteration of the conceptions of the political and economic order and arena have remained at the very core of the cultural program of modernity, the character of such ontological framings have varied from place to place and across time in terms of the organization of social institutions such as "family life, economic and political structures, urbanization, modern education, mass communication, and individualistic orientations (1). Modernity, Wittrock (2000) thus argues, is often "culturally constituted…" (38).

Africa's own modernity is one grounded in ambivalence (Macamo 2005; Deutsch, Probst and Schmidt 2002). First, the continent encountered modernity in the context of colonialism but that same historical moment was also one that denied Africa any form of modernity (Macamo 8). Second, in the current context of a global neoliberal order where economic opportunities predominate in one axis of the world [the North] and not the other [the South], Africa has somewhat watched the global project of modernity unfold for the most part from the position of a by-stander or victim. Both global socio-economic forces and internal political rancour has been responsible for this peripheral positioning of Africa in the midst

of an unfolding global modernity. But as Duetsch, Probst and Scmidst (2002) have rightly noted, in spite of its seeming peripheriality, a recognition of the modern-day "world as characterized by multi-directional global flows of people, ideas and goods ...has [serious] consequences for the discussion of African modernities" (11). These processes of circulation, diffusion, or what Appaduria (1996) calls "flows" mean that Africa, like other global cultural entities, appropriates, adapts, reworks, and reinterprets globally percolated ideas, images, capital, and goods into new contexts and functions, with serious consequences for essentialist and universalist meanings of (post)modernity.

This variability in the cultural construction of modernity in Africa and elsewhere has huge implications for reading African youth cultures. Youth cultures in Africa, while being locally situated, also draw copiously from globally circulated ideas, images, and cultural resources in making and negotiating specific local conditions. Nadine Dolby (2001), in an interesting study of schooling, racial identity and youth cultures in South Africa, demonstrates eloquently how the formation of new identities by black youth are traceable to global flow of images and cultural resources rather than distinct local cultures. In other words, for young people in South Africa, like most African youth, "[I]dentity is patched together from sources that bubble up all over the globe" (Dolby 63). Dolby's work thus generally demonstrates how the African youth are "poised at a three-way juncture: an ever changing traditional culture that exist for many only in the imagination; the urbanization of modernity; and the globalizing thrust of postmodernity" (63).

My reading of *Face of Africa* thus aims to demonstrate a classic example of the textualization of the new phase[face] of the postcolonial postmodern experiences of youth in Nigeria that privileges insights into what Anoop Nayak (2003) has described as " the new spaces that emerge in the local-global nexus, and in particular upon the different subject positions young people create in response to global change" (4)—i.e. the ways in which a new youth generation in Nigeria is negotiating a unique social existence in the context of a global late modernity marked by fluidity, uncertainty and risk. As a specific site of discourse, I take up the notion of the modern human body 'as text,' and explore the ways in which 'lifestyles,' especially with regards to fashion, could become unique cultural avenues through which youth in the contemporary Nigerian (African) world shape their identities in the process of navigating a tenebrous, unequal, complex, and contradictory postcolonial modernity. The discursive thrust here is to illustrate how the videos visually foreground the unique ways young people in contemporary Nigeria encounter power relations in the public sphere and how they negotiate those encounters individually through the formation of unique 'lifestyles' especially via body language in the form of fashion.

Youth Culture and Modernity in *Face of Africa*:
Lifestyles, Distinctions and Urban Identity

Set in a contemporary Nigerian university campus in the modern mega-city of Lagos, *Face of Africa* literalizes a very simple conflict between two

teenage girls, Tracy (Rita Dominic) and Eucharia, alias UK (Oge Okoye).[5] The core conflict revolves around UK's deliberate purchase of an identical blouse which Tracy also owns. Tracy and her flamboyant middle-class friends see this imitation as an affront and invasion of a privileged class space and thus plot to extinguish UK's attempt at evening up with what they believe to be an exclusive and enviable social status within the university. This central conflict, seemingly quotidian, complicates, and then rises to engulf other characters including the academic staff such as Professor Ojo, administrative personnel, and other students, especially the youthful male folk in campus fraternities.[6] It is important to note that within the context of this seemingly hackneyed plot, the cultural politics around fashion demonstrate that it assumes huge social significance as "a reflection of economic forces" (Purdy 8), between those who have [Tracy and her friends] and those who do not [Eucharia), and the deliberate ways in which they both want to reflexively demonstrate their economic and social power. The conflict, in the context of a modern postcolonial Nigerian society, thus assumes existential importance because as part of one's presumed 'lifestyle,' it demonstrates how fashion lays claim to a "unique position within time and space" (Purdy 11).

In making sense of the life-politics that unfold in the postcolonial postmodern Nigerian (African) world of this film, an understanding of the class dynamics between the central characters is imperative. Tracy and Cindy are

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[5] Each of these protagonists is in turn supported by a network of friends who are directly or indirectly enmeshed in the ensuing conflict. For Tracy it is Cindy and Stella, while Alice sticks with Eucharia.

[6] The subject matter of secret cults in Nigerian Universities is itself another youth culture that requires independent study on its own, but it is a theme far beyond the purview of this research.

clearly from a privileged middle and upper-class background surrounded by a world of expensive and flashy cars, big and exquisite mansions, trendy clothes and make-up, cell phones and other modern communication gadgets like I-pods, and large sums of disposable income. This is the quintessential world of the privileged late modern teenager immersed in the largess of late modernity marked by commoditization, consumerism, and hedonism. Undoubtedly, Tracy and Cindy are conscious of, and indeed, revel in their socio-economic exclusivity around the campus, dominated mostly by lower-class indigent students seeking to improve their lot, supposedly, through higher education.

On the other hand we find UK, a fatherless and impecunious sophomore who returns to school with only a minimal quantity of groceries and five thousand naira for the term.[7] Unable to afford independent university accommodation, UK squats with friends in different hostels at different times. Her wardrobe is also scanty and modest. This very precarious situation is not lost on UK. The identity politics that thus emerge between Tracy and UK are traceable to their knowledge of the respective power structures which govern each of their lives. The invention of new 'lifestyles,' either to sustain and protect those privileged structures (as in the case of Tracy and Cindy) or to upset and improve an inclement socio-economic condition (as in the case of UK), is a classical example of how amongst youth in late modernity, "consumption and lifestyles have become central to the process of identity construction" (Furlong and Cartmel 9). This ambition, solely

[7] By the current exchange rate this will be approximately $50 (CD). This very meager allowance includes both her tuition and her upkeep allowance for the whole term.

pursued in the cultural arena, is what activates the seemingly ridiculous conflict that we see in *Face of Africa*.

As a way into the identity politics in *Face of Africa*, my critique will inevitably make recourse to some of the recent culturescapes of late modernity that have been offered by social clinicians. I begin with the notions of reflexive modernization and the emergence of risk societies (Beck 1992; 1994), and individualization and self-reflexivity (Giddens 1991). An essential element of late modernity, Becks (1994) notes, is its very predatory nature, what he refers to as its "creative (self-)destruction" (2). According to Becks, "reflexive modernization," is a new stage in the development of late industrial civilization in which "progress can turn into self-destruction, in which one kind of modernization undercuts and changes another…" (2). This radicalization of a modernity that feeds on itself, that is, where one modernity breeds another—has meant that late modernity is in a perpetual state of dissoluble flux. The direct outcome of this "modernization of modernity" is that uncertainties, indeterminacies, and impreciseness become key components of late modernity. This radical shift, from an older, dependable, rational/scientific, and certain worldview, to one of [un]predictabilities and uncanny uncertainties breeds a new sense of social insecurity. It is this social condition of uncertainty in late modernity that Becks (1992) describes as "risk society."

According to Becks (1994), the risk society concept:

> designates a developmental phase in modern society in which the social, political, economic and individual risks increasingly tend to escape the institutions for monitoring and protection in industrial society. (5)

Clarifying the discourse of "risk society," Anthony Giddens (1991) has noted that the idea of "risk" does not suggest that late modernity is more calamitous, but rather that "it introduces risks which previous generations have not had to face" (4). Such risks include the fear of nuclear warfare, totalitarian regimes, and environmental threats, mostly brought about by man's technological and scientific advances, and interminable regressive global economic conditions which threaten the very existence of people all over the world. The failure of protective social structures which guarantee social certainties and securities in late modernity has thus bred a new social condition in which there is a greater reliance on the "self" rather than the collective/social. There is a "dis-embedding" of the late modern subject from traditional support structures such as nation, class, family, school, religion, etc. The modern subject is thus atomized and increasingly made to account for her/himself. It is this social phenomenon that Anthony Giddens (1991) calls *individualization*. The ontological insecurities and existential anxieties brought about by late modernity's meaninglessness, uncertainty, and insecurity mean that both institutions and the individual must mediate their social experiences or rework their environments to achieve desired goals; hence Giddens argues, "[s]elf-identity becomes a reflexively organized project" (5).

If the late modern subject is not to be extinguished by the self-reinventing capacities of late modernity, especially with regards to its predatory and

competitive nature, both institutions and individuals in modern societies must consciously re-orient themselves towards constant "improvement and effectiveness" (Becks 31). Self-reflexive living in late modernity thus requires a conscious, calculated and systematic appraisal of enveloping conditions and the reworking of those conditions to one's advantage. So, as Giddens argues, the 'self' becomes a continually reflexive project in the condition of late modernity. The individualized modern subject always situates him/herself at the heart of every social project and thus reflexively re-forges his/her biographic trajectory. Put simply, the conscious and systematic positioning of the 'self' in relation to shifting social, economic, political, and cultural oppositionalities becomes central to late modernity. Understandably, lifestyles assume "particular significance" in this modern social ambiance (Giddens 5). By lifestyles we do not here refer, in the most limited sense, to the affluent displays of privileged classes only. According to Giddens, 'Lifestyles,' broadly, refers to "decisions taken and courses of action followed under conditions of severe material constraints" (6).

To be clear, the concept of "lifestyles" itself is not new. Reimer (1995) sufficiently demonstrates that the notion of lifestyles could be traced back as far as even the classical period of sociology at the turn of the century when, as an independent discipline, it sought to engage with "what it meant to live in a society permeated by industrialism and urbanization—a society constantly changing" (121). The concept thus became a recurrent theme in the works of early sociologists such as Weber's (1919/1978) *Economy and Society*; Veblen's (1899/1948) *The Theory of the Leisure Class,* and other such works by Simmel

and Tarde (See Reimer 121). Most of these classical sociologists were concerned with activities (lifestyles) created by people who lived in big cities as "part of conscious effort[s] to express social position" (Reimer 121). But the emergence of late modernity from the late 1980s witnessed a dramatic resurgence in the concept of 'lifestyles' amongst social scientists. Concerned with finding meaningful ways with which to conceptualize social attitudes amidst a wobbly modernity, the 'lifestyle' theory re-emerged as a way of explaining new attitudes or cultural formations of a complicated and dynamic social reality.

What does all this mean for contemporary youth? A number of studies have amply shown that the radicalization of global modernity from the late 1980s onwards has also meant a fundamental alteration of the life-course or social experiences of the modern youth (Fornas and Bolin 1995; Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Epstein 1998; Mallan and Pearce 2003; Nilan and Feixa 2006; Leccardi and Ruspini 2006). According to Furlong and Cartmel (1997):

> …in the modern world young people face new risk and opportunities, the traditional links between the family, school and work seem to have weakened as young people embark on journeys into adulthood which involves a wide variety of routes, many of which appear to have uncertain outcomes. (7)

The disembedding social processes of individualization suggested by Becks (1992) and Giddens (1991) for instance have meant that the modern urban youth must now evolve independent and individual identity politics to cope with an unequal, unjust and rapidly changing social reality. Uprooted from the supportive

social structures of family and community, the autonomized modern youth must imperatively call upon his or her inventive social capabilities to navigate a social reality contoured by volatility and unpredictability.

It is here then that we can begin to make sense of the "reflexive" identity politics between Tracy and UK in *Face of Africa*. Thrust abruptly into the uncertain underbelly of an African modern mega city [Lagos], UK is 'disembedded' from the supportive social structure of her family and community. Impoverished, insecure, and anxious, she comes face to face with the realities of a harsh postcolonial modern world where she must face the "social risks" of uncertainties and indeterminacies. It is also a new social phase wherein those who dominate her social environment seek to exclude her from feeling a sense of belonging. Left alone to her wits, UK must "reflexively" reinvent and [re]locate herself appropriately within a late modern postcolonial world marked by difference, exclusion, and marginalization. What *Face of Africa* literalizes then is the reflexive identity politics of a modern Nigerian youth seeking to "clear a space" (to use Appiah's phrase) within a competitive world of commercialization and consumerism. It is here then that Bourdieu's notion of *distinctions* becomes relevant.

While it remains a very controversial work, Bourdieu's *Distinctions* (1979/84) provides a deep cultural sociology on the organization of contemporary modern life. Underlying the concept of *distinctions* is the idea that the very hierarchical structure of the modern society implies that we locate ourselves properly within it especially through conscious judgments, choices and tastes—in

associations, lifestyles, discussions, etc. Vital to this cultural dynamic is what Bourdieu calls *capital;* a range of cultural resources, both material and intellectual, which an individual has access to, and could possibly mobilize or deploy to forge a distinctive social identity. Capital could either be economic, political, or cultural. The modern social space for Bourdieu (1993) then is a cultural "field of forces" where varied lifestyles are invented and adopted as a way of marking out people's different capital. In the age of late modernity, marked by industrial capitalism, consumerism, and commoditization, lifestyles assume a new cultural role of defining the self and also clearing a space within a competitive and predatory civilization. Late modernity, as we have already demonstrated, is a moment of the collapse of family, nation, and so forth, marked more by the prioritization of the individual. The politics of the self, in relation to the social environment, through commoditized lifestyles therefore becomes central in the invention of personal subjectivities in late modernity. What emerges is a new cultural politics of *enselfment* and separatism. What we observe between Tracy and Cindy is what Michel De Certeau (1988) has referred to as "[t]he Practice of Everyday Life" in which, "once a group is able to self-isolate, it 'postulates a place that can be determined as its own and serve as the base from which relations with an exteriority composed of targets or threats …can be managed'" (Qtd in Kearney 151). The character of UK then is a classical example of the cultural politics of "Everyday Life" in contemporary postcolonial modernity in which Kearney argues "separatism requires the opportunism associated with tactical maneuvering: that is, the ability to transform

circumstances into favorable situations that recognize space and thus challenge imbalances in access" (151). In this modern postcolonial dynamic, as we see in Tracy and UK, the body becomes a significant symbol of identity construction.

Maria Pini (2004) offers an insightful cultural analysis of the unique ways in which the "human body, as the site of power operations" (Pini 160) could become a significant cultural tool for inventing new identities in a competitive and precarious world of late modernity. Referencing Michel Foucault, she notes that the formation of new subjectivities is inextricably bound-up with the specific knowledge/power dynamics within each cultural setting. For Foucault, power does not "exist outside of, or separate from the individual body, as an oppressive or repressive constraint" (Pini 160). Thus, Foucault's argument is that though "the self" has traditionally been seen as different from the "body," in reality, they are not, because the "self" is often in relation to external social factors encountered always by the "body." In other words:

> the physical body has to be seen as the primary surface upon which "the self" is inscribed and/or constructed. This means thinking about our "selves" as produced out of many ways in which our bodies are classified, managed, disciplined and regulated by others and by ourselves. (Pini160)

According to Pini, Foucault's argument can therefore be summarized as follows:

1. Selfhood or subjectivity is produced out of the many ways in which our bodies are classified, managed, disciplined and regulated by others and by ourselves.
2. Power works through this management of bodies

3. The individual body is not 'passive' but can also be a site of resistance. (164)

Against this theoretical background, Pini argues, we can begin to make sense of the numerous ways in which the "body" has become a site of power where youth exercise control over themselves as well as engage with the public amidst heinously intolerable conditions of political and economic difficulties. According to Pini, "in a moment where most young people can 'manage' little else, the body provides the primary site for management and also becomes the primary vehicle for the achievement of pleasure" (164). The tendency towards drugs, alcohol, and even fashion (as we see in *Face of Africa*) must therefore be apprehended against the backdrop of young people's quest to assert not only independence from "parental and societal regulation" of their bodies, but also as "attempts to explore the pleasuring and management of one's self" (165).

Conscious of her marginal place within the broader social, economic, and cultural ambience of her new environment, UK seeks to reflexively resituate herself and reconstruct her life's biography. This is also the ambition of Tracy and her friends; that is, in relation to a threat of dislodgement (by UK) from a privileged status of social exclusivity. This reflexive project is undertaken purely with/in the body. UK's body becomes both a site of power and a tableaux for *texting* her identity. As a site of power, UK dubiously mobilizes her body/femininity in acquiring the vital fiscal capital with which she then reinvents herself for the public. She does this essentially through sex work with different rich patrons in the city. But apart from selling her body, UK also steals money

and expensive jewelry from her patrons. On acquiring the needed financial capital, her body also becomes the primary site for "reflexively" constructing a new postcolonial modern persona for Tracy, her friends, and indeed the entire campus. She rents a new apartment decked with exquisite furniture and modern electronic appliances, buys a flashy car, collects for herself the most gorgeous fashion apparels from the latest highbrow designer shops in town [Lagos], and ultimately wins the campus beauty pageant. As a site of power, UK's body also becomes the virulent instrument for attacking her perceived enemies. While providing sexual favors to a tenured faculty in her department (Professor Ojo), she is able to co-opt him into her identity politics by asking that he fail Tracy in his course. This dubious mobilization of the body should not be read simplistically; it must be understood and interpreted as a desperate response from a marginalized person who "inhabit[s] the places and spaces that promote suffering and oppression" (Giroux 44). UK's body then, like that of many other modern postcolonial youth, becomes what Giroux (1998) has described as the "principal terrain for multiple forms of resistance and [a] register of risk, pleasure, and sex" (28).

Perhaps no one else provides a more sophisticated analysis of the cultural politics of "reflexive" identity formation which we describe here than Garcia Nesto Canclini. In his exceptional work *Consumers and Citizens* (2001), Canclini examines and maps the unique consequences of urbanization, global media influences, and commodity markets on citizens. For Canclini, consumption in late

modernity constitutes a new "means of thinking" that offers new avenues for citizenship. According to Canclini:

> [f]or many men and women, *especially youth*, the questions specific to citizenship…are answered more often than not through consumption of commodities and media offerings than through the abstract rules of democracy or through participation in discredited political organizations. (5, emphasis added)

At a moment of huge cultural changes that fundamentally alter the relation between private lives and the broader social reality, "the main terrains where mass tastes and citizenship are shaped" are those of the cultural sector, such as film, video, and television (Canclini 32-3). With the attenuation of the influences of normative social structures such as the nation-state, family, class, community, etc, the crucial existential questions of who people are, and where they are in society are today largely answered through consumption of industrial commodities. So the cultural sectors doubly shape and also express emerging new cultural formations of identity and citizenship.

Face of Africa is a typical illustration of how the modern Nigerian (African) youth, obsessed with responding to questions of identity and place within the precarious postcolonial late modern social set-up, is both defined by, as well as communicates through the popular culture sector such as the video film. The lives of the youth we see in *Face of Africa* and other such visual representations about glamour, commoditization, and consumerism express not only the ontological insecurities, existential anxieties, and social angst of young

people amid a vacillating global modernity, but also their social struggles to culturally position themselves properly within such phenomenally tumultuous social changes. The continued expansion of urban centres, the tidal wave of mass media images and texts, and the intensification of market economies have activated new cultural politics among young people who desperately seek to know who they are. Lifestyles, through fashion and other consumerist orientations, become central to these quests. In the words of Furlong and Cartmel (1997), the general decline in labour markets has created a cultural scenario where "young people are increasingly turning to the market place to purchase props for their identity, which can make them more confident in their relationship with their peers" (62).

But in a world predominated by cruel scarcities and immense inequalities, these cultures of consumerism and commoditization become froth with enormous social risks. The young people who do not have legitimate access to the defining cultural resources of late modernity often make recourse to shadow underground economies which often lead to personal disasters. As Furlong and Cartmel argue, when young people are denied legitimate chances as "stake holders" in society, they in turn "look for alternative sources of satisfaction, some of which carry health risks or make them more vulnerable to police surveillance and arrest" (9). This is indeed prophetic for as we see, UK ends up in police custody for theft [from her patrons] and attempted murder [of Tracy]. Tracy is attacked by assassins hired by UK and flown abroad for treatment by her politician father. It is a postcolonial tale with a disastrous outcome for the lives of the young. But the

blame lies deep in a late modern society too much at break-neck speed and contoured primarily by consumerism and commoditization.

Youth, Invisible Economies, the Occult and the Struggle for Social Space in *Living in Bondage*

The idea of a postindustrial economic order, especially as one different from the initial mechanisms of industrial capitalism, has become a significant site of critical attention by both scholars and public commentators. This bourgeoning critical culture emerged particularly from the 1990s onwards owing to the collapse of communism marked by the ultimate fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. This single historical event was considered to have redefined the contours of global trade and investments. The new phase of the economics of postindustrial society has now been christened by some scholars as "the end of organized capitalism" (Lash and Urry 1987), a new kind of postindustrial economic terrain which Scotts Lash (1999) has distinguished as being marked by a "different rationality."

Underlying the renewed interests in postindustrial capitalism is the anticipation by social scientists—economists, political scientists, and sociologists—that the phenomenal growth and increased emphasis on market economies and free trade inheres huge transformative consequences for the lives of both individuals and institutions in the context of the "second coming of capitalism" (John and Jean Comaroff 2000). The crystallization and spread of the new political order of neo-liberalism, and the phenomenal advancements in modern science and technology, have all conjoined to structure a new global

economic order that embodies both positive and negative outcomes for late modern society. These global formations, not only limited to international economies, but also in geo-politics, science and technology, and even culture, have contributed to a world of rapid changes, which social clinicians fear portends enormous social risks for the modern wo/man. It is this new but fleeting global social reality of the late modern economy that Giddens (2003) has described as "a run away world." For Giddens, "we now live in a world of transformations, affecting almost every aspect of what we do" (6).

Now, the reference to the idea of a global postindustrial economy and its systems of relations inevitably points to its twin component, globalization—an already clichéd concept in both the academic domain and the general public sphere. As Giddens (2003) has argued, perhaps more than any other social concept, "the term 'globalization' has itself become ever more globalised" (xi), seen from different perspectives, with variegated meanings, and at times assuming different nomenclatures in different national spaces.[8] Our concern here then is not so much with the definitive meaning of the term since the term has varied economic, political, cultural and even scientific and technological interpretations. Suffice it to say that globalization, in very broad terms, is usually mobilized to hint at the idea that we all, irrespective of geographical location, now live in one single de-territorialized world. The crucial question we are however confronted with is: "…in what ways exactly…?" (Giddens 7). The tendency amongst discussants of globalization is always to theorize it as something "out

[8] Globalization in France is referred to as *mondialization* while in Spain and Latin America it is called *globalizacion.* The Germans call it *Globalisierung* (See Giddens 2003: 07).

there', remote and far away from the individual" (Giddens 13). More than anything else, o*veruse* and *underspecification*, Jean and John Comaroff (1999) argue, are the albatrosses of globalization. But in reality globalization is equally "an 'in here' phenomenon too, influencing intimate and personal aspects of our lives" (Giddens 13).

It is perhaps for this reason that Esping-Anderson (1999) has argued that for there to be any meaningful critique of what he calls the "social foundations of postindustrial economies," such a project must begin from the very micro household/family economy. For Esping-Anderson, "the household economy is *alpha* and *omega* to any resolution of the main postindustrial dilemmas…" (6). Esping-Anderson's theoretical framework seeks to connect the powerful currents of the global postindustrial capitalist systems to specific biographic trajectories of (post)modern lives. This structure of postindustrial critique is indeed significant for our study because in many ways it aligns with some of the recent arguments offered by the Nigerian video scholars. Jonathan Haynes (2007) for instance argues that Kenneth Nnebue's films, and by extension Nollywood in general, oscillate between two sustained primary thematic threads: "the domestic level, narrativized through marital and family melodrama…and a much more unusual kind of film [which he] calls the anatomy of power ...structured around the analysis of social issues on a wide canvass" (32). In other words, while the nodal point of the conflict may be located within the domestic, the domestic has deeper connections to larger social issues of economic production, consumption, and power. In this segment, I will chart the theoretical path offered by Esping-

Anderson by using specific cinematic representations in selected Nigerian video films to not only illustrate how postindustrial capitalism is redefining the social experiences of young adults, but also to demonstrate the ways in which young people, in response to the postindustrial economic *zeitgeists*, are reinventing new cultural formations for survival. Maira and Soep (2005) have described these new cultural formations of young people in general as "youthscapes."[9]

The social consequences of postindustrial capitalism on the lives of young people all over the world have already been explored by a flurry of social science literature (Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Blossfeld *et al* 2005: Leccardi and Ruspin 2006). For these scholars, the concern is not so much with highlighting global postindustrial economic changes, but with identifying what Furlong (2006) has insisted is "more accurately the significance of those changes" in terms of how they govern the lives of young people world wide (xvi). The overwhelming thesis is that the very competitive and fluctuating character of postindustrial economies, marked predominantly by risks and uncertainties, has given rise to a "de-standardization" and "complexification" of the normative processes or pathways of youth to adulthood (Leccardi and Ruspin 2006; Leccardi 2006). What exist now are what Biggart and Walter (2006) call "Yo-Yo-Transitions," where the normative youth life-courses to independent adult life "have become less linear, more complex and also reversible" (42). The argument holds that the transnationalization of markets and the prioritization of profits, the esotericization

[9] The authors apparently draw from Arjun Appadurai's analysis of the distinctive effects and manifestations of global cultures in the realm of finance (financescapes), ideology (ideoscapes), technology (technoscapes), etc. See Appadurai's (1996) *Modernity at Large*

of knowledge (the emphasis on expertise and specialization), and the consequent expansion and increase in educational levels, coupled with the intense flexibilities that now dominate the electronic economy of the postindustrial era have all conjoined to fragment and desynchronize youth transitions (Wallace and Cross 1990; Irwin 1995; Catan 2004; Rouche, Tucker and Thomason 2004; Bradley and Hickman 2004, Blossfeld *et al* 2005). The changing fortunes of youth in the postindustrial labor markets have now been directly linked to these major socio-economic changes (Bradley and Hickman 2004). Taken together, these critiques surmise that the materialization of an economic order which emphasizes professionalism and specialization has tightened the social space for youth all over the world.

Postindustrial economic regimes entail sweeping socio-economic changes such as the universalization of markets (through the dissolution of national borders), the intensification of competition (through liberalization, deregulation and privatization), the growth of information and communication technology thereby broadening information flows and reception, and finally, the prioritization of markets and profits (Mills and Blossfeld 2005). Collectively, these structural social changes, according to Mills and Blossfeld, are "generating an unprecedented level of structural uncertainty in modern societies…" (2). Very crucial here is not so much the atmosphere of uncertainty, but how this uncertainty is "filtered" through institutional structures.[10] Two examples can be

[10] The authors argue that these global mechanisms have direct bearing, and are in turn buffered by what they call social "institutional filters" such as the educational system, employment relations,

cited here to illustrate my point. First, globalization's emphasis on the intense professionalization of labor means that esoteric skills acquired through prolonged learning and training become key capital in the hiring dynamic of the new global postindustrial economic order. In this way, training and experience constitute crucial forms of socio-economic leverage and those without it are compromised in the emerging labor market dynamics. Second, in other cases, training might be prioritized so that not all forms of educational qualifications are helpful for youth. The geologist and petrochemical engineer are more likely to gain employment before the English or history graduate. Consequently, the very young in society with lesser education or less sort after training are thus doomed to suffer in this highly competitive scenario on account of their inexperience or choices. For instance, people with more professional skills are more likely to earn more and have security of jobs than those with lesser specialized skills.

There are implications to these types of uncertainties in a globalized age. Life decisions become dependent on the skills acquired by any member of this very competitive society. For example, those with more skills, and most likely, a well-paid and stable job are also more likely to begin families much earlier than others who have not accumulated the same training. In other words, there is a vertical connection between macro-level globalization mechanisms and micro-level life-course amongst the youth of modern postindustrial society. There is thus an increased tendency for youth to try to catch up with what Erik Klijzing (2005)

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welfare regimes, and the family. Their thesis is that these institutions in one way or the other filter the impacts of globalization at the micro level of society.

calls a "knowledge-based, service-oriented economy" (32) thereby prolonging their stay in schools and other training centres. These new social dynamics for instance have the potential, Klijzing argues, "of postponing decisions in other domains of life that require a high degree of self-binding commitment from individuals on their way to becoming adults…" (40). The implication, of course, is that transitions now are not only protracted, but there has also arisen an "individualization" of transitions where youth increasingly derive distinct individual modes of social transition to independent adulthood (Mork and Anderson 2006).

This hint at youth agency in the midst of a slippery, foggy, and cruel post-modernity is indeed significant because it seems to reify Bhabha's thesis that there is always an "emergence" in the midst of every "emergency" (Qtd in Lipsitz xxi). The new cultural constellations that emerge from amongst youth in the process of coping with the changing mechanisms of postindustrial capitalism are not in any way disembedded from the global culture of transnationalization and electronic market economies. These new youth economies borrow the central features of the moment in remaking their own life transitions. It is here then that we turn to the idea of "the invisibility" of postindustrial economies, especially as a key element of contemporary postindustrial capitalism, in making sense of the emergence and popularity of what Jean and John Comaroff (2000) have tagged "occult economies" especially amongst youth.

In their introduction to volume 12 number 2 of *Public Culture,* entitled "Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on second Coming," the Comaroffs note

that consumption has become key to the formation of social values and even the construction of identities in postindustrial societies. According to them, consumption, represented by that "Gucci-gloved fist" or what they call "the invisible hand," is now "an invisible abstract force" which "animates the political impulses, the material imperatives" and even the broader cultural values of the new millennium (294). As consumption becomes the prime force behind postindustrial capitalism, they argue "there has been a concomitant eclipse of production; an eclipse at least, of its perceived salience for the wealth of nations" (295). The nature of capitalism has thus changed with a radical re-definition of the workplace from a physically stable geo-economic site to a roving, abstract site of economic activities. The outcome of this neo-liberal culture of late capitalism, the Comaroffs argue, is the sudden emergence of really intangible and invisible "ways of generating value" (295). The socio-economic consequences of this radical shift in the contours of postmodern industrial capitalism includes the sudden proliferation of alternative economies for spinning wealth such as gambling, speculative market investments, occult economies, and prosperity gospel churches. These are all dimensions of a growing culture of capital production in the millennium where "securing instant returns is often a matter of life and death" (Comaroff and Comaroff 296). In the prevailing temperament of global millennial post-industrial market economies, industrial capitalism has transformed into "casino capitalism" (Strange 1986; Tomasic and Petony 1991), where the world, as Fidel Castro noted, has "become a huge casino," (Comaroff

297)—a gigantic gambling center overwhelmed by desperate and dubious quests for stupendous and instantaneous wealth.

What has followed then is a redefinition of the relation between labor and capital. The increasing abstraction of capital, its continued *distantiation* from physicality has occasioned the elision of labour power and the moral and social obligation of multi-national corporations to its labor. All this has been made possible with the diversification and democratization of new media technology leading to electronic economies where Giddens (2003) argues, "fund managers, banks, corporations as well as millions of individual investors, can transfer vast amounts of capital from one side of the world to another at the click of a mouse" (9). Within this new system of capital production, labor (often considered an object) is expendable, since there are more cheap labor markets made up of marginalized people—children, women, youth, and the poor especially in the third world. This new dynamic of *ephemerality* between capital and labor has in turn led to the erosion of the power of state over production forces with huge consequences for the continued notions of sovereignty and the welfare of the ordinary citizenry (Comaroffs 302). The direct effect of this global economic dynamic has been the phenomenal decline in formal youth labor markets since the 1980s.

The evanescent character of postindustrial capitalism and its accompanying element of increased unemployment on the one hand, and its consequences for young adults on the other, seems to be at the hub of Kenneth Nnebue's film, *Living in Bondage*, described by Jonathan Haynes (2007) as

Nollywood's "*locus classicus*" (32). The film literalizes the struggles of a jobless and impecunious young man, Andy Okeke (Kenneth Okonkwo), who, out of frustration from persistent unemployment, compromises the life of his wife Merit (Nnenna Nwabueze) for occult sacrifices in a bid to make quick money. In the blurb of a recent DVD remake of the film produced and distributed by Nu Metro,[11] it is described as "the story of a man's involvement in the occult and its accompanying consequences." This reading is prototypical of the standard critiques of the film since it was first released in 1992. Most of the critiques of *Living in Bondage* harp on the *consequences* of the protagonist's "greed" and "materialism" especially as a young man of the city (Okome 2003; McCall 2004; Haynes 2007). While not questioning these savvy critiques, I argue however that this emphasis on the *consequences* of the occult gloss over the fundamental catalytic forces that precipitate the calamitous end of Andy's life and family. This critical oversight is indeed dangerous because it ignores the stifling socio-economic atmosphere of cruel scarcities that surrounds Andy and other working class characters in the film, and thus misreads the protagonist's attempt at agency which unfortunately boomerangs.

In an earlier reading of the film, Okome (1998) noted that *Living in Bondage* is a visual index of social change; one about a society transiting at supersonic speed from an "official" traditionality to an "unofficial" modernity (55). This forceful argument is indeed seminal to the understanding of the seismic

[11] Nu Metro Home Entertainment, West Africa is a South African film distribution company whose primary concern is the remaking of Nigerian video classics into DVDs and redistributing those films in supposedly better visual quality to the public. It has digitalized and redistributed films such as *Thunderbolts, Violated, Onome, Living in Bondage, the Gardener, Domitilla, Moral Inheritance* and many others. It has its Nigerian office in Victorian Island, Lagos.

socio-economic changes unfolding within the universe of *Living in Bondage*. Yet, this critique is strangely indifferent to the very minutiae of the technology of change unfolding around the protagonist and other young denizens of the murky urban terrain of the film. While acknowledging the social shift that *Living in Bondage* privileges, Okome argues however that "the place of the individual in the social is difficult to construct" (53). This is indeed ironic because his own very analysis privileges both the local/micro and global/macro socio-economic forces that forcefully impel Andy and his ilk away from a traditional value system that they know, and indeed still retain in their very subconscious, to a new postcolonial modernity characterized by what Okome himself describes as "western [global/macro] lifestyles; big cars, ownership of modern telecommunications network, big deals with companies with overseas branches and headquarters, and women" (51).

At the local/micro level, Andy's life is on the edge, marked by unemployment, general material privation, magic and superstition, fraud and deception, corruption, institutional and individual violence, and other countless bizarre realities of Nigerian urban life of the early 1990s. At the very heart of the narrative then are deep structural socio-economic ineffectualities that animate the implosion that we witness in the character of Andy, which of course ultimately endangers those around him. These out-of-the-ordinary social changes set in motion massive socio-economic and cultural strictures that are not experienced evenly by people in the same society. Clearly, Andy's "place" as an individual in relation to the "social" as we see in the film cannot be compared to his generation

in the millionaires' club.[12] Mortimer (1994) has eloquently made the point that "the experience of unemployment is not the same for all youth and that key individual attributes importantly moderate the experience and the consequences of being without work" (xii). The entire narrative of *Living in Bondage* then is a dramatization of what Adrian Furnham (1994) has referred to as "the psycho-social consequences of youth unemployment" especially amidst unequal experiences of social change.

We begin our analysis of the youth crisis in *Living in Bondage* from the personal micro/local level. As the film opens we see Andy Okeke restless and clearly lost in thoughts as he wanders around his sitting room. Within minutes he receives a mail from the post-man, of course another letter of rejection from one of the several employers from whom Andy has been seeking a job. In this expository scene we know that Andy has unsuccessfully worked five jobs, the last being a bank where he voluntarily resigned on account of bad wages or what he himself refers to as "peanuts." Yet, Andy is not despondent; he has also tried his hand at self-employment, engaging in private business enterprises. Apparently, that hasn't panned out well either, perhaps because of his very modest capital and/or lack of good business networks. His entrepreneurial attempts through friends have also not paid off either; his friend Robert swindles him of twenty thousand Naira—#20,000.00 (approximately $200.00CD) after proposing a business venture that Robert claimed could rake in thrice the investment. It is important also to note that Andy is not the only unemployed young adult in the

[12] The millionaire club is a small click of young money bags and international business men with whom Andy is later to hook up in the film.

universe of this film. The large pool of women who litter the narrative space of *Living in Bondage,* especially as sex objects, are also in the *bondage* of Unemployment.[13] Andy thus is only a quintessential prototype of the large body of young men and women experiencing serious difficulties during the quaky transition to economic independence because of unemployment and general economic stagnation and/or decline. Like many others experiencing the aftermath of the Nigerian Post-structural Adjustment era of the 1990s, Andy leads what the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (1980) had described as a "sort of 'twilight existence' in the labour market, experiencing prolonged spells of joblessness interspersed with brief spells of unsatisfactory employment" (11).

The late 1980s (and early 1990s) particularly remains a gruesome historical moment for the lives of young people in Nigeria and many parts of the world. It marked the beginning of a global decline in formal youth labour markets. As Winefield *et al* (1993) have noted, "[u]nemployment rates increased in most countries from 1990 to 1991" (3). For example, in 1992 it was estimated that almost "half (thirteen) of the OECD countries were expected to have unemployment rates of around 10 per cent or more, ranging from 9.6 per cent to 16.5 per cent" (Winefield 3). In the United States, the worsening situation of young people in the labour market has been traced to as far back as the 1970s "apparently because of the huge increase in supply resulting from the entry of the

[13] This is clearly articulated by Tina's friend when she escapes being sacrificed in the cult shrine by Andy's cohorts. She attributes their very dangerous life of prostitution to the lack of jobs. I go on to discuss representations of the sexual exploitation of young women further in Chapter Four.

baby boomers into the job market" (Blanchflower and Freeman 1). Analysts had noted that while there appeared to be sporadic improvements in youth labour markets, they feared that there were strong indications of a further deterioration of the ratio of youth labour in relation to the adult population from 1980 onwards. Perhaps this estimation was indeed right because emerging studies since the 1990s have consistently pointed to the downward spiraling of the global youth labour markets (Ryan, Garonna Edwards 1991; Winefield et all 1993; Peterson and Mortimer 1994; Blanchflower and Freeman 2000).[14]

The abysmal decline in employment opportunities for youth all over the world has been traced to economic, scientific/technical, and social forces (Goronna and Ryan 1). In the economic arena, it has been argued that the global economic regression and/or stagnation beginning with the fall in crude oil prices in the early 1970s, further complicated by the global economic recessions in the early 1980s, had a huge reductive impact on the demand for youth labour in the global economy affecting the fortunes of young people world wide (OECD 1980). With regards to scientific/technical factors, it has been observed that the radical shift from labour-intensive to capital-intensive industry production on account of improvements and advances in science and technology has hugely reduced the

[14] Although most of these studies are based on data drawn from North America and Europe they also signify the inclement economic conditions faced by young people in Sub-Saharan African countries like Nigeria. As I have already noted in my introduction, usually a one percent economic decline in the West may activate a 1.5/6 percent in developing countries. So that in a certain sense these studies suggest even a gloomier picture in developing countries. And the lack of specific scholarship in youth and unemployment in sub-Saharan Africa is indeed an example of the lopsidedness of youth scholarship in the last one hundred Years. In fact, even the recent rereading of Paul Willis' *Learning to Labour*, jointly edited by Nadine Dolby [a profound scholar of African youth] and Greg Dimitriadis, do not even take into consideration the plight of youth [un]employment situation in Africa (See Dolby and Dimitriadis 2004).

demand for youth labour forces (Winefield 10). Scientific and technological developments have increased the demand for most young people to advance and prolong their training so as to meet the demands of complex industrial jobs and careers (Hess, Peterson and Mortimer 1994; Blossfeld 2005). And last, but certainly not the least, is the social fact of the phenomenal demographic explosion in the global youth population from the 1970s requiring increased jobs for survival amongst young people.

The universal problem of youth unemployment brings with it huge consequences both at the personal "psychological" level on the one hand (Winefield et al 1993; Furnham 1994) and the broader social geography on the other (Grotenhuis and Meijers 1994). At the micro/psychological level, unemployment often has a depressive effect (negative moods), brings about feelings of hopelessness, and general depreciatory self-esteem (Winefield et al 1993). At the macro social level, youth may respond to unemployment in positive ways "by postponing entry in the job market and remaining in school," they could change disciplines or fields (say from liberal arts to business and management sciences), stay longer in family homes, "postpone setting their own families," etc (Blanchflower and Freeman 6-7).[15] But there are also negative responses, such as gravitation towards crime (Freeman 2000). When unemployment persists interminably, its repercussions always manifest on the domestic plane, "for example, on marital harmony" (Winefield et al 18). According to these authors, prolonged periods of unemployment and its psycho-social consequences, if not

[15] Also see Claire and Wallace 1990; Blossfeld et al 2005.

handled properly, "may lead to various forms of anti-social behavior…[such as] wife and child abuse, alcoholism or other forms of drug abuse, as well as criminal activities such as house-breaking and shop-lifting" (19).

What does all this mean for reading the world of *Living in Bondage*? The first half of the film (part one) is dedicated to Andy's psychological trauma on account of his unemployment status; depressive moods, hopelessness, loss of self-esteem, etc. But these personal psychological effects have huge social implications. As Winefield and others have shown, the trauma of unemployment could lead not only to matrimonial destabilization, but also general social insecurity in the form of crime. This forecast is quintessentially Andy's; his negative moods snow-ball, exploding ultimately at the domestic realm and thus finally becoming a social crime of ritual homicide. But the very roots of this personal turmoil and social turbulence are to be found in the absence of a general social safety net for the emerging generation of young adults like Andy scattered all over Nigeria during the brutal years of military dictatorship and IMF's Structural Adjustment Program.

All around Andy is an on-going, thriving but invisible economy that excludes him and his family. His friends and contemporaries—Paulo, Okey, and John—are all living well in posh palatial edifices and with state-of-the-art cars.[16] Clearly, Andy's experience metaphorizes a post-industrial economic order which Giddens (2003) notes "creates a world of winners and losers, a few on the fast track to prosperity, the majority condemned to a life of misery and despair" (15).

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[16] This is pretty much the lavish world of *Blood Billionaires*, another popular occult movie in Nollywood.

So while Andy's end is tragic, his struggle represents the many desperate struggles of young people to seek relevance in an uneven socio-economic atmosphere of production, power and consumption. According to Hyginus Ekwuazi (2000), Andy's life, as a young man, is unfolding in the context in which there has been a major social shift from one of communal achievements to one of individual accountability, and yet, the same society that emphasizes individual achievements does not provide a level playing field for all individuals to engage their potentialities (137-8). And in many ways it seems that Andy was much more brilliant than even his video creators. Though set in the 1990s, the character of Andy envisaged the emergence of an invisible postindustrial (post)modern economic order that will elude rational apprehension. The world of a selected few in *Living in Bondage* is one of abstract transnational capitalism; with ownership of several companies in Italy, Hong-Kong, and Dubai; with business magnates like chief Omego moving twelve containers of assorted wares from abroad into Lagos every week; with Ichie Million globe-trotting for business meetings from China to New York. Andy beholds this fabulous world but cannot hold and feel its contours from a direct subjective perspective. Andy's motive then is to permeate this invisible economy of prosperity. His final recourse then is to the occult—*la sorcellerie.*

A tremendous amount of literature already exists on the subject matter of the occult in postcolonial African politics, economy, and culture (Geschiere 1997; Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; 1999; 2000; Smith 2001; Moore and Sanders 2001). And as some of these analysts note, this dramatic outburst of witchcraft or

"occult economies" in both the private and public domains is not in any way peculiar to the African post-colony, nor is it a sign of primitivism and/or the irrationality of backward civilizations (Geschiere 1997; Comaroff and Comaroff 1999; Moore and Sanders 2001). Indeed, other studies now privilege the increased manifestation of the lurid economies of occult enterprises in places like Central and South America where dealership in human body parts for both medical and ritual purposes have assumed disproportionate dimensions, becoming the norm rather than the exception (Scheper-Hughes 1996; 2002). The latter trend, Scheper-Hughes (2002) argues, is reflective of the problem with postindustrial capitalist economies in which everything—"including human beings, their labor and their reproductive capacities—[has been reduced] to the status of commodities that can be bought, sold, traded, and stolen" (62).

Peter Geschiere (1997), in his very seminal work on the sociology of witchcraft in postcolonial Africa, has argued that for any proper apprehension of "the resilience of the representations of witchcraft and the occult in many parts of Africa, *the challenge is rather to explore the possibilities offered by these discourses for attempts to gain control over the modern changes*" (15, emphasis added). Whether read in the context of a social change from traditionality to modernity (Okome 1998), from communalism to individualism (Ekwuazi 2000), or from traditional capitalism to postindustrial market economies (such as we are concerned with here), films like *Living in Bondage, Rituals, Blood Billionaires,* etc., privilege new cultural economies that emerge directly from attempts at "leveling-up" in the midst of a booming culture of accumulation. According to

Comaroff and Comaroff (1999) most young people in postcolonial entities experience post-coloniality in the form of "privation" or lack and "it is the males amongst them [like Andy], more than anyone else who have to face the apparent impossibility of the contemporary situation" (284). The increased gravitation towards the occult as narrativised in *Living in Bondage* and other such films like *Rituals* and *Blood Billionaires* not only represents the despondency of young people in the continent in the face of economic hardships, but also the sometimes weird cultural formations which have begun to form around insufferable conditions of unemployment, poverty, and other forms of social inequities experienced at both the domestic and/or public realm.

The phenomenon of the occult itself, as some studies have shown, is in fact heightened by recurrent media reports of the lurid activities of politicians and mega- business tycoons (Bastian 1993; 2001). These reports chronicle strange tales of the egregious activities of reputable social figures in subterranean occult practices for selfish political and economic gains. For instance, in mid September, 1996, there emerged an explosive media coverage of what has come to be known in Nigeria's popular parlance as the Otokoto Saga, in which an 11 year-old boy (master Ikechuk-wu Okonkwo), was murdered in a Hotel in Owerri, South-eastern Nigeria, on September 19, 1996.[17] Again, in 2004, following a tip-off, a team of Police officers led by the then Anambra State Commissioner of Police (Mr. Felix Ogbaudu), visited an occult port (the Okija shrine) where they were confronted by a gruesome discovery; headless bodies, corpses, and human skulls.

[17] The key suspects in this ruthless murder were Ekeanyanwu (the star suspect), Chief Leonard Unogu and Chief Vincent Duru alias Otokoto, and six others (See Odita 1997 and Smith 2001).

Also recovered from the shrine was a register containing names of all patrons including a sitting state Governor, Dr. Chris Ngige, who had patronized the shrine.[18] These garish tales not only fertilize the creative mill of Nollywood (Harding 2007), they point poignantly to arguments that there is indeed a strong correlation between the proliferation of "magical interpretations" on the one hand and "material realities" on the other (Moore and Sanders 2001).

In the face of failed states that are unable to deliver the great promises of decolonization and neo-liberalism, and the continued stagnation of postcolonial economies recurrently vandalized by thieving postcolonial elites, the youth are finding new cultural pathways of transiting to independent and self-sufficient adulthood. In this quest, the normative values of the old generation do not suffice anymore. A new postindustrial economic zeitgeist that prioritizes profits over life certainly requires a new and parallel cultural response which we are now beginning to witness in the form of neo-cannibalism. *Living in Bondage* and other gaudy tales from Nollywood are a narrativization of the emerging responses of young people to an evanescent, ephemeral, and ultimately futile postindustrial economic order marked by poverty, joblessness, and powerlessness. They offer a visual index, as Comaroff and Comaroff (1999) note, of "an expansion that often breaks the conventional bounds of legality, making crime, as well as magic, a mode of production open to those who lack other resources" (289).

[18] Indeed, on the Wikipedia website are two pictures of Theodore Orji, current governor of Anambra state, Nigeria when he went to swear allegiance to his predecessor, Orji Uzor Kalu at the shrine before he was given the governorship ticket.

Taken together, both *Face of Africa* and *Living in Bondage* depict the cultural politics of young people staring directly at postcolonial uncertainties and social exclusion in Nigeria and their daily struggles to keep afloat. In their different struggles to survive, they draw on a vast range of cultural resources, from within and around them, as a means of surviving the really inclement and asphyxiating socio-economic conditions they are facing. And the choices they make may not be morally or legally upright, but they constitute the rude realities, complicated life, and complex choices that young people in Nigeria [and perhaps other sub-Saharan African countries) have to make every day as a way of keeping precarious lives on the balance. The social outcomes, as we have seen in both films, are never pleasant. But the roots of this social crisis lie deep in the failure of both local systems/structures and global forces.

Chapter Three

The Failed Postcolony and Violent Youth Responses in *Issakaba* and *Maroko*

Failed States and the Militarization of Youth in Sub-Saharan Africa: Insecurity and the Crisis of Citizenship in *Issakaba*

> *One hypothesis to be pursued is that when the state collapses, order and power (but not always legitimacy) fall down to local groups or are up for grabs.* (Zartman 1995: 1)

One significant social phenomenon that has gained public prominence in West Africa especially since the 1990s is the sudden widespread proliferation of local youth wings in the form of vigilantes, militias and other emergent cultural economies of private security networks.[1] Whether on the busy streets of urban towns or rural communities, in the compounds of big business conglomerates or in the offices of ruling (or even oppositional) political parties, new "military principalities" in the form of vigilantes and other personalized armed movements seem to have taken centre stage in the subcontinent (Mbembe 2000). According to Melissa Leach (2004), these new paramilitary movements are often found operating, "as security guards, civil-defense fighters, environmental guardians, actors in party politics, and articulators of emergent regional and ethnic identities" (vii).

At one level, this dramatic upsurge of vigilantism and other such mercenary security networks could be apprehended as an indicator of a broader

[1] I use the term "cultural economies" particularly as a way of sign-posting the uniquely unconventional trend in sub-Saharan Africa in which violence and brutality have become products to be sold and bought by those who have the money to purchase them and those who have the will to dispense them. In other words, I want to emphasize the place of monetary gain within the exchange of violence.

culture of the politics of ethnic sub-nationalisms in Africa, a political economy of ethnic rivalry which a number of scholars have so well theorized (Olorunsola 1972; Agbu 2004). The trend could also be perceived as being symptomatic of the general "re-traditionalizing" processes of governance in Africa (Bayart 1993; Chabral and Daloz 1999) where there has emerged an increased personalization of sovereignty and the civil society (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999; Mbembe 2000; 2001).[2]

At another level however, these new youth movements could also be fruitfully interpreted as a marker of the terse rise of alternative—and most often violent—responses to collapsed states in Sub-Saharan Africa, especially where such states fail abysmally in fulfilling their civic responsibilities of protecting their citizens as the sole "security guarantor for a populated territory" (Zartman 5). As bearers of what Barbara Cruikshank (1999) has described as "pre-political interest[s] or identity" (25), citizens often have security as one of their most prized individual and collective social interests. When the state abdicates that responsibility, the citizens, as people with rights and socio-political and economic concerns, often find alternative avenues for securing their wellbeing. This alternative mode of negotiating citizenship, especially as visually demonstrated through popular urban culture in Nigeria, is the focus of this chapter's segment.

And the very fact that young people are the ones at the very hub of contemporary modes of personalized state policing, law enforcement and the

[2] By personalization, these scholars are referring to the unwieldy mode of governance in Sub-Saharan Africa in which the personal political and economic interests of the ruling elite override the broader sovereign interest of state.

administration of justice unfolding in West Africa is indeed significant. This social fact calls attention to the distinctive ways in which the African youth, in spite of their enormous social disadvantages, are negotiating new citizenship niches by taking on new tasks in new contexts that are at once social, economic and political. In this segment therefore I will be arguing that cultural representations such as Nigerian popular video films privilege serious and forceful insights into contemporary socio-cultural processes in West Africa especially those relating to the failure of state, general insecurity of lives and property, new citizenship patterns, and how all of these separate national trends intersect with what Brian Heaphy (2007) has hypothesized as the global processes of the restructuring of both social and personal lives.

This segment of chapter three thus aims at forging a hinge between notions of citizenship on the one hand, and youth culture in Nigeria, on the other. The specific focus of my critique is to illustrate how realist historical portrayal of events in popular visual cultures such as the video films demonstrate a particular instance of Mbembe's articulation of how new "forms of territoriality and unexpected forms of locality" (261) have begun to take shape in many postcolonial polities in Sub-Saharan Africa. Using a four-part video film which chronicles the activities of one particular instance of youth vigilantism in south-eastern Nigeria between 1998 and 2003, I intend to build on the broad discursive pathways already foregrounded by Mbembe (2000) in demonstrating how Nigerian youth now stand poignantly at the centre of an emerging cultural geography of counter-institutional social responses which often "do not

necessarily intersect with the official limits, norms, or language of state" (Mbembe 261). I seek to rationalize the representation of vigilantism in *Issakaba* as unsurprising and understandable youth responses—as citizens—to the recurrent postcolonial crisis of state failure; of political instability/insecurity; of economic stagnation or decline; social inequities; institutional duplicity and what some scholars have now described as the general atmosphere of the "privatization of sovereignty" in much of the political landscape in Africa (Wohlgemuth et al 1999; Mbembe 2001). The long-term cultural outcome of the aforementioned modes of governance, I argue, is the shaping of new cultural imaginaries marked by the founding of "sovereignty outside of state" (Mbembe 260) by disgruntled citizens, particularly young people who do not see any secured futures in the unfolding patterns of dubious postcolonial govermentality. But in re-reading these new geographies of anti-state movement by youth through the medium of the video film, it is perhaps necessary to offer the specific socio-historical context that has given rise to these extra-legal and radical social movements.

Failed States: the Nigerian Context

Yusuf Bangura (1998) has noted that the 1990s in Sub-Saharan Africa was generally a decade of remarkable social changes marked by vigorous democratization processes especially as part of what he calls the "third wave of democratization" in the global world system (1).[3] In Nigeria, these extraordinary

[3] The idea of the "third wave of democratization" is originally traceable to Samuel Huntington (1991). For Huntington, the first wave refers to vigorous processes of democratization which

changes in the political landscape were activated by the concerted struggles of a congeries of social factors: a vociferous and critical press, unflinching civil rights groups, radical student movements, quasi-oppositional political parties, trenchant left-wing industrial unions, a disillusioned and despondent intelligentsia, and general mass support from common people (Agbu 1998; Jega 1994; Olukoshi 1993). The general estimation was that majoritarian rule marked by popular control and management of power and national resources through representative governance would inevitably bring about a more beneficial socio-economic atmosphere to the mass of people that have long suffered under the hegemonic grip of military dictatorship. Underlying these struggles was the hope that the supposed intrinsic link between democratization and modernization would foster a market-based industrialization process that will inevitably give rise to broad-based level competition which theoretically would help the growth of economic autonomy. In short, at the time, the expectation was that the democratization process would redefine the entire social experience of the mass of suffering people in Nigeria for the better.

Unfortunately however, most of these hopes evaporated into oblivion soon after the restoration of democracy in Nigeria in 1999. The pillaging of national resources continued and a destabilizing poli[tricks] marked by deception rather than genuine commitment to national growth proceeded unabated. Nothing seemed to have changed from the sordid socio-economic conditions of the three

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started with the French and American revolutions in the 18th Century. The decolonization and democratization struggles experienced immediately after the Second World War marks what Huntington describes as the second wave of democratization.

decades of military rule dominated by soldiers obsessed with oil and a commercial political economy (Panter-Bricks 1978). The reasons for this failure of the post-military democratization process in Nigeria of course lay deep in accretions of a long social history of clientelist and privatized political practices: an inherited barrack culture or a garrison mentality characterized by ruthless postcolonial govermentality; a new class of politicians cum businessmen and women heavily dependent on state patronage; and an incorrigible culture of corruption that all conjoined to breed a new political atmosphere of prebendalism and patrimonialism. These dubious political cultures of course were (or rather are) not typically a Nigerian phenomenon, for as a number of studies have shown, these trends have predominated most postcolonial African states since the 1980s (Callaghy 1987: Joseph 1987; Bayart 1993; Chabral and Daloz 1999).

The unwieldy political atmosphere in Nigeria was again exacerbated by the lingering effects of the gruesome structural adjustment policies. The insufferable conditionalities finagled on most African countries by international financial organizations from the mid 1980s onwards brought about phenomenal distortions in the socio-political landscape of most third world countries. These draconian conditionalities for short term loans, according to Mbembe (2001), involved " a range of direct interventions in domestic economic management, credit control, implementing privatization, laying down consumption requirements, determining import policies, agricultural programs and cutting costs—or even direct control of the treasury" (74). The overall result of these belt-tightening economic management strategies in Nigeria, combined with the

clientalization of politics in the late 1990s was, as in most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, "the deepening of mass poverty" (Mbebe 55).

What emerged in Nigeria then were unprecedented crises of unemployment, housing foreclosures, poor educational training, and decline in the healthcare sector, state insecurity and many other threatening socio-economic disjunctures. This condition of cruel scarcities became the rule rather than the exception especially for the daily lives of ordinary Nigerians, particularly women, youth and children. Clearly, not only had the revolutionary agendas on which vigorous political movements for neo-liberal democracy in the country during the 1990s been compromised, but the continuing catastrophic activities of the ruling elite had succeeded finally in vandalizing the once vibrant economy of a promising nation once perceived as the "giant of Africa."

The broader cultural consequences of these worsening national dynamics in the public domain were ghastly; increased armed banditry, violent crimes and other forms of shadow economies crystallized in the social arena. Rather than attenuate the pervasive conditions of low standards of living and their concomitant corollary such as increased criminality, the emergence of democracy instead stoked the flames of poverty and insecurity in the country (Gore and Pratten 2003). Thus, what we have begun to witness in Nigeria from the 1990s, like most countries in the continent, is "dramatic irruption of young people in both the public and domestic sphere" (Diof 3). Both in the accentuation of heightened criminality and militancy on the one hand, and in the fight for social justice, civil rights and national resource management, youth in Nigeria, like their

counterparts everywhere in the continent, now stand at the very center of the continent's "social imagination" (Durham 2003), assuming different social roles mostly as dissenters, villains and/or even as stabilizers of national peace.

This new social positioning of young people is not difficult to relate with in the context of Nigeria's social experience. Southeastern Nigeria particularly became tense beginning from the 1970s. The demobilization of troops after the Biafra war (1967-70) left a huge pool of civil war veterans without proper re-integration into normal productive social lives. Left with only guns and devoid of any legitimate means of survival, the upshot was the recourse to violent criminality (Gore and Pratten 229). Also, the sustained marginalization of the region from the resources at the federal level of government made the situation worse for the southeast region. The burst of violent criminality in the region in 1990s was only the boiling point and it tells a great deal about how unequal state relations, marked by political and economic marginalization, often lead to "new forms of belonging and social incorporation" in the form of "leagues…corporation [and] coalitions" from below the state sphere (Mbembe 2001, 93).

Needless of course to say that the scenarios we paint here, both in political and economic terms, are undoubtedly symptomatic of a failed state. According to Chomsky (2006), failed states can be identified, amongst many other things, through:

> their inability or unwillingness to protect their citizens from violence and perhaps even destruction… and if they have democratic forms, they suffer from a serious 'democratic deficit' that deprives their formal democratic institutions of real substance. (2)

But how do young people respond to cases of these failed states, especially when the states no longer protect life and property? What do cultural representations such as *Issakaba* tell us about novel technologies of citizenship developed by young people in Nigeria?

The Bakassi Vigilante: A Historical Background

One of the most memorable burst of youth in the public sphere in Nigeria was the sudden rise of the "Bakassi Boys," a youth vigilante group that emerged in the South Eastern geo-political zone of the country in the late 1990s. A flurry of critical literature already exists on that social movement (Agbu 2004; Baker 2002; Gore and Pratten 2003; Harnischfeger 2003 & 2006; Ikelegbe 2005; Smith 2004; Ukiwo 2000). The exploits of the Bakassi vigilante have also been re-chronicled in a four-part Nigerian video movie entitled *Issakaba*[4] and a number of critical essays have also dwelled on this film (see Gore and Pratten 2003; McCall 2004). In making sense however of *Issakaba* as a peculiar narrative of what Ajibade (2006) has termed "contested citizenship," it is important to locate the movement within a specific national history of what Bayart, Ellis and Hibou

[4] Readers will note that the title of the film is actually the name of the Bakassi movement inverted with an additional "a".

(1999) have described as the general "criminalization of the state" in Africa.

Founded as a youth vigilante group in Aba, a major metropolis and commercial nerve-center in the Igbo speaking area in Southeastern Nigeria in 1998, the primary task of the "Bakassi Boys" was to protect shoe-makers and other traders from the nefarious activities of criminal gangs in the Aba main market, especially in the face of institutional apathy by the state and its law enforcement agencies such as the police. As host to one of the many big markets in Nigeria, and a prospering hub at a moment of post-structural adjustment economic crisis in the country, Aba became (and still is) the epicenter of a vicious circle of criminal activities by gangs. According to Johannes Harnischfeger (2003), "[a] veritable colony of criminals lived directly on the fringes of the market on Ngwa Road, regularly going round the market, collecting protection money from each of the shops and stalls" (23). Failure to comply simply meant the confiscation of goods by these terrorizing men of the underworld. Amid all of these illegalities and criminality, local newspapers reported that the official institution of state, "the police, looked the other way and in fact collaborated fully and saw to the death of people they ought to protect" (See Baker 226).

But this atmosphere of criminality and lawlessness came to a head in 1998 when a prominent businesswoman was robbed of Two Hundred Thousand Naira (#200.00)[5] and brutally murdered. The traders, knowing that the safety of their businesses depended upon the safety of their customers, rose in unison and

[5] Barring current exchange rates, this would amount to approximately $2,000.00CD. In the filmic adaptation of the story, it however mentions three million Naira #3,000,000.00 (approximately $30,000.00CD)

"forced their way into the criminals' houses, dragged out everyone they could lay hands on, and hacked them (sic) death with machetes" (Harnischfeger 24). This is a classical example of how vigilantes emerge "as defenders, often by force, of their view of the good life against those they see to be its enemies" (Abraham 1998, 1). Clearly, since the state had failed in its duty to protect life, property and businesses, the traders invented alternative ways of securing their own.[6]

The youth were at the forefront of this social revolution. The Aba traders soon contributed money, recruited several hundreds of jobless young men often lurking around the market, bought weapons for them, paid their wages and entrusted them with the sole responsibility of protecting lives and businesses. Their success was phenomenal! They rounded up suspected criminals, undertook swift and independent investigations, and meted out what became known as "instant justice" to alleged criminals.[7] The execution of criminals mostly "took place in prominent public spaces such as major intersections or market centres, attracting large crowds of observers" where most of the assumed criminals were dismembered with machetes and burnt immediately at the site of execution (Smith 429).[8] Within weeks, as if by some magical means, the whole city was rid of criminals. The shock waves of the seismic activities of these dare-devil youth who were confronting, arresting and prosecuting notorious criminals had penetrated

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[6] The then governor of Anambra state, Dr. Chinwoke Mbadinuji, described the activities of the Bakassi vigilante as the Igbo's age old tradition of "protecting its defenses" (See Baker 2002; Hanischfeger 2003; Smith 2004).

[7] As Harnischfeger tells us, most of these criminals were known by name including even the places they could be found. So it is not difficult to see how the "Bakassi Boys" so easily rounded them up effectively.

57. See scene of *Issakaba* where the vigilante boys basically decapitate the head of an alleged criminal right in front of a cheering mob.

the very social foundations of a once lawless society. Before long, the "Bakassi Boys" were co-opted by the Abia state government led by Orji Uzo Kalu to help fight crime in the state.[9]

Following the phenomenal successes of the "Bakassi Boys" in Aba, traders in neighboring urban centers like Onitsha in Anambra state also impressed on their governor, Dr. Chinwoke Mbadunuji, to import the private security outfit to protect them from criminals. At the time, Onitsha, home to the biggest market in West Africa, repeatedly witnessed atrocious activities of men of the criminal world marked by coldblooded violence. In 2000 the city's experience of violent criminality included a "gang of 120 men who attacked a market and left dozens dead and hundreds injured" and another where armed bandits "stormed a Lagos-Aba bus killing over 30 passengers" (Baker 225). Overwhelmed by these ruthless criminalities, the governor acceded to the cries of his people and the "Bakassi Boys" were invited into Anambra state. The result was miraculous: "from the time of their inauguration in July of 2000 until January 2001, there were practically no armed robberies anywhere in Abia [or even Anambra] state" (Baker 227). The two states became crime free with very minimal crime rates. That year the Nigerian Union of Journalists awarded Anambra state, once the most dreaded province to tread in the country, "the safest place in Nigeria."

In the extant accounts of the activities of the Bakassi vigilante, it is apparent that its activities did not go unchallenged. Most critics, especially

[9] An enabling law was passed in the state legislature and the youthful crime fighters became known as the Abia State Vigilante Service (ASVS).

conservative professionals in legal matters and even international organizations such as Amnesty International and the Human Rights Watch saw the group as an extra-legal institution transgressing the rule of law and operating outside the ambience of due processes of law enforcement and the adjudication of free and fair justice. For example, in its special report, the Civil Liberty Organization documents the egregious human butchery perpetrated by the Bakassi Boys, accrediting the group with up to two thousand extra-judicial murders within a space of one and a half years alone (See Harnischfeger 26). Even the Human Rights Watch (2002) had condemned the activities of the Bakassi boys noting that often they boy were used for intimidation and killing of political opponents (36). But these antagonisms were also matched by a fierce public support for the boys. The contention by the popular masses was that what the police and other security agents could not do in almost a decade, the "Bakassi Boys" did in less than three months. Furthermore, as Smith has argued, popular support for the Bakassi vigilante "grew from the perception that they protected not only the market and the individuals who do business there but also the very foundations of social and economic life," since the south-east generally was a commercially-oriented place (433). These contentions raise serious questions about the perception and reception of these kinds of interventionist activities by youth; whether as apocalyptic forces wherein youth are often seen as villains—hostile and destructive, or as liberatory agents with altruistic purpose; people in pursuit of justice and general social security as Jeremy Seekings (1993) has argued in the case of youth violence in South Africa.

Very few accounts of the Bakassi Boys, however, have paid attention to them as a youth movement. Generally, it has either been critiqued as a popular response by the masses to the decline of state (Baker 2002; Harnschfeger 2003/2006; Smith 2004) or as part of a broader pan-ethnic sub-cultural nationalism sprouting all over Nigeria and indeed, the whole of sub-Saharan Africa (Agbu 2004; Ikelegbe 2005; Nolte 2004). Yet, from what we know of its formal institutionalization in both Abia and Anambra states, Bakassi was a byproduct of sheer spontaneous public angst and then later nurtured and sustained by the state itself. So both the conditions that gave rise to the movement on the one hand, and its accelerated ascension and entrenchment within the society on the other, were made possible by the state and the broader public. What we are witnessing, then, is a set of naïvely altruistic youth caught between the vicious antics of an indifferent state and a desperate adult public. Thus, the youth were wedged in-between, perceived simultaneously from both ends as villains and heroes.

This social fact seems to elude most of the forceful critiques about the Bakassi movement. In what follows, I intend to broach a youth-centred critique that locates young people at the very centre of the debate about the history of the Bakassi movement and the ways in which visual representations of the movement in the video films privilege access to new kinds of citizenship niches by young people, especially in moments of grave national political, economic, and social ambiguities. In recalibrating the discourse of the Bakassi vigilante through its filmic representation in *Issakaba*, I seek to tease out: 1) how the film legitimizes

youth vigilantism as an alternative moral and political order against an inept and corrupt state, 2) how that new order resourcefully redeploys the same instruments of domination deployed by the state, and 3) how that politics of redeployment reconfigures the civil society in terms of state-society-citizen relations. I will also explore how these aforementioned factors reconstitute the idea and practice of citizenship by young people within the contested terrains of Nigeria's social experience.

Villains or Heroes? Re-reading Bakassi Boys via the Prism of the Video Film

A wild romance piece reminiscent of the American westerns, *Issakaba* is captioned as a chronicle of "the mind-blowing exploits and rituals of a secret society turned vigilante group" (Gore and Pratten 229). The very prologue of the film where Ebube, the film's protagonist (Sam Dede) speaks directly to the camera with the words, "justice has come to town," articulates the social agenda of this pack of dare-devil youth. Its menacing but dogged attempt at restoring justice in an otherwise lawless society is apparent from the opening scene when Ebube decapitates the head of a crippled beggar.[10] Undoubtedly, this is a gross subversion of the due process of the administration of justice and a travesty of the rule of law. But we do not have to look far in order to make sense of this extra-

[10] When the film opens we see a bus load of youth (all boys) dressed in black driving through the street. Suddenly they disembark from the bus shooting into the air with their rifles. People scamper off in different directions and the then the unexpected happens; they decapitate the head of a beggar seated somewhat innocently by the road side. As bystanders confront them for their actions they retrieve several short guns and bullets from under the barrow where the beggar was seated; the beggar was an undetected criminal dealing in dangerous munitions.

judiciality because the narrative evidence is produced instantly. The beggar is unraveled for us as a gun-runner selling lethal weapons to criminals terrorizing the town. Of course he is not alone in this underground economy of dangerous munitions. The film literalizes a prospering but treacherous subterranean weapons economy going on unfettered, run by ordinary market women and scores of jobless youth. The modes of operation of these shadow economies themselves prefigure the deceptive tapestry of normal activities going on within the universe of *Issakaba*.[11] What the film sets up then is a thriving criminal economy perfumed by inexorable violent crimes like armed robbery, ritual murders, and gun-running. The film's opening scenes thus suggest a prototype of Woodcock's idea of a failed state where anarchy and a survival economy reign supreme: "laws ...are not carried out into effect, authorities without force and despised, crime unpunished, property attacked, the safety of the individual violated, the morality of the people corrupted, no constitution, no government, no justice…" (See Abubakar 57).

In the world of *Issakaba,* institutions of state such as the police, army and the judiciary have become completely inept, powerless, and to say the least dubious. In fact, the state is complicit in the very pervasive atmosphere of criminality that we are witnessing. For as we see in the opening scenes of *Issakaba*, the very machinery of terror is dubiously sustained by the institution of the state, the police. In one of the very early scenes of the film for instance, a woman gets robbed of her car, money and jewelry. She proceeds immediately to the police station, drenched in her own blood, seeking and hoping for swift action

[11] Market women dealing in hand guns and bullets masquerade as sellers of roasted corn and pears. So they refer to the guns as "corn" and the bullets as "pear fruits."

that might help retrieve her stolen vehicle. She is instead treated with levity and later dismissed off-handedly by the police to return in two weeks. But in an ironic twist the police boss details his lieutenants to contact the criminals and ask for his own share of the bounty from the robbery. From the experience of this researcher, the proceeds from these kinds of subversive state policing do not end with local police bosses; they often float upwards through state police commissioners and end finally at the very desk of the nation's Inspector General of Police. The divisional police boss in the film is also in league with local fiefs whose prosperity derives from funding local robbery gangs. Visually articulated here then is what Mbembe (2001) has described as the perverse:

> privatization of public violence, and its deployment in aid of private enrichment [where] elements of the police, army, customs and the revenue services attempt to ensure their grip, through drug trafficking, counterfeiting money, trade in arms and toxic waste, customs fraud, etc. (85)

As a narrative of emerging niches of radicalized citizenship in postcolonial sub-Saharan Africa, *Issakaba* not only foregrounds the struggles of young people seeking to negate the dubious shadow economies crafted by a failed adult generation, but also how they actively carry out their own social obligations as aggrieved citizens amidst a postcolonial world gone berserk with a dangerous fever of accumulative politics.

Issakaba dramatizes two distinctive political phenomena in contemporary West Africa. First, it anatomizes the weird and complicated political dynamic that

constitutes current political leadership and governance in the continent marked essentially by "the political instrumentalization of disorder" (Chabral and Daloz 1999). The bigger forces that are responsible for the reign of terror in the universe of *Issakaba* are famous community leaders such as Chief Mbanefo, the police, and sons of prominent members of the community. But Chief Mbanefo is also a famous political leader and philanthropist in the village, awarding scholarships to indigent students and funding several community projects. Indeed, it is he who first offers a Mercedes Benz car and 3million Naira[12] as an initial "grant" for the Issakaba boys when they first make their foray into the village. This contradictory communal role, simultaneously as political leader, philanthropist and crime sponsor, foreground some of the most interesting theoretical readings of contemporary politics in Africa.

Chabal and Daloz (1999) have offered an in-depth reading of the kind of complex and contradictory political economy that we witness in *Issakaba.* Indeed, their nuanced analysis privileges a great understanding of why there is a persistence of intractable problems of chronic economic decline, recurrent political instability, intractable criminality, and civil war in much of Sub-Saharan Africa (xvi). The authors argue that getting to the heart of these problems demands apprehending what they see as the instrumentalization of disorder. According to the authors, this term refers to the "process by which political actors in Africa seek to maximize their returns on the state of confusion, uncertainty, and sometimes even chaos, which characterize most African polities" (xvii). And very

[12] Official Nigerian currency approximately amounting to about $30,000.00CD

central to this hypothesis is the argument that the political sphere in Africa is one of the privatization of the formal institutions of state. Unlike the quintessential state, where, as Max Weber theorized, the state is completely divorced from the personal interests of the individual, the case in Africa is reversed wherein this Weberian notion is upturned with individual prejudices infiltrating the formal workings of state. The blurring of the dichotomies between state versus private interests, and:

> the osmosis between private economic agents (national and foreign) and local incumbents of power and authority [makes] possible the generalization of an economy of allocation of which indigenes [are] not the sole beneficiaries. (Mbembe 51)

This dynamic, forcefully and constantly propelled by political leaders in their bid for power and wealth, especially for the purposes of lubricating private and ethnic political clients, is what continuously ignites regimes of disorder and chaos such as we see in the *Issakaba.* This anomie is continually appropriated for the political ends of the postcolonial political elites themselves.

But these dubious modes of governmentality do not often go unchallenged, and this is where I pose the second political dynamic which I think the film narrativizes. Often times there are strong public responses to the instrumentalization of disorder by the state. *Issakaba* particularly literalizes youth responses to the pervasive mode of subversive governance through the reinvention of the same failed system, affirming William Zartman's thesis

(articulated in the epigraph to this chapter) that "when the state collapses, order and power (but not always legitimacy) fall down to local groups for grabs" (1). The *Issakaba* boys are clearly aware of the explosive political landscape in which they have thrust themselves. For as the protagonist tells the elders' council: "A river does not run through the forest without bringing down trees." Ebube is sentient to the fact that the activities of the youth vigilante will certainly bring down influential power blocks within the community. The *Issakaba* youth thus emerge, within the subversive environment of the "instrumentalization of disorder" in the film, as the leading voice of change, seeking to restore order, control and eventual sovereignty in the people's own hands. In fact, as Ebube tells the group's local guard, he is aware that the entire mission might be a travesty of justice, both before the law and God, but the depth of rot and institutional duplicity demands a total overhauling of the system from the top to the bottom. And I think this is where we need to make a distinction between the extra-legality of the Issakaba boys, on the one hand, and the criminal gangs that they fight, on the other. As an alternative moral and political order, the *Issakaba* youth take a moral high ground uncommon within the decadent ambience of the film's narrative universe. As a narrative of the new niches of citizenship that have begun to crystallize everywhere in the subcontinent, *Issakaba* reveals how youthful "social practices are mobilized as response to, and a protection against, the state" (Gore and Pratten 212) whose technologies of domination and exploitation have taken a Mephistophelian dimension. The activities of the criminal gangs within the world of *Issakaba* may be conceived as an informal and socially unapproved

response to the failure of state to provide for its younger generation, but the *Issakaba* youth differ from these criminal gangs because their aim is to protect and not prey on defenseless citizens like the criminals.

Issakaba also narrativizes not only the instrumentalization of disorder in Africa, but also the dubious instrumentalization of youth. It is a visual representation of how postcolonial political elites, as Ikelegbe has noted, "…build, fund and manipulate youth and identity organizations for lawless and violent power struggles" (493). Let me cite a specific historical event to buttress my point. When the real Bakassi vigilante emerged in the late 1990s, its methodology of instant justice by beheading (such as we see in the opening shot of the movie) soon attracted vociferous criticisms. In response the federal government attempted to proscribe the youth group. But the Ohaneze, the Igbo umbrella cultural/political organization, protested. These protestations were legitimate because when a similar youth militia, the Odua People's Congress (OPC), was proscribed in Southwest Nigeria, political leaders from that region "immediately demanded its de-proscription because of an alarming rise in crime rates" (Ikelegbe 508).[13] The Igbo political leaders were aware of this precedent. So when some of its governors and other political leaders protested against the banning of "Bakassi Boys," they were actually playing up a national political script in the contexts of inter-regional and ethnic political struggles and rivalry.

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[13] The umbrella Yoruba organization itself had been formed in August 1994 in response to the annulment of the most popular elections in Nigerian history, won by a Yoruba man, late Mushood Abiola. But the organization also had a youth wing, which served as its security apparatus. The OPC therefore "emerged as result of the perceived marginalization of the Yoruba…" by a military government led by a northerner (Ikelgbe 497, Nolte 71).

The final recruitment and manipulation of Nwoke at the end of the movie and his subsequent betrayal of the group's secrets and efforts is a subtle reference to the political instrumentalization of youth in Nigeria and indeed in many other countries in the subcontinent in which young people have become agents used by the ruling elite in furthering their private political and economic interests.

Bayart (1993) also provides another interesting political economy of leadership in Africa that might be helpful in making sense of the *Issakaba* narrative as youth culture. The foundation of Bayart's argument begins from discountenancing some of the prevailing notions about Africa's politics and economy. He argues that the persistent notions of Africa without a history, and the subsequent conquests that these notions brought about (imperialism), have led to the popular belief that Africa is a victim of the "yoke" of "dependency" on the West. What these kinds of notions have engendered for a long time is the idea that the cycles of hunger, disease, wars, economic crisis, and political instabilities in the continent have occurred as a result of the sordid history of years of dependency on the West. Indeed, politicians from within the continent have capitalized on these popular views for their own selfish political ends. Bayart argues however that the bulk of Africa's crises are fomented from within its postcolonial political class. He untangles the complicated internal political dynamic in the continent where the quest for power and wealth has led to the creation of an unequal society of "big men and small men." In the desperate desire for the accumulation of wealth and power, what has emerged in the continent is a unique politics dominated by the prioritization of personal gains.

Using the Cameroonian metaphor about the goat that eats where it is tethered, Bayart illustrates how a new politics of corruption and uncontested economic fraud, what he calls "the politics of the belly" now dominates the continent. This exploitative political dynamic, dominated by the excessive accumulation of wealth, is central to some of the lingering problems of wars and violent crimes in Africa and it is this trend that is narrativized in popular urban tales such as *Issakaba*. But the *Issakaba* narrative is essentially a cultural representation of how young people have begun to subvert this "politics of the belly" through collective social struggles.

Very significant in the movie is the mode of operation of Issakaba; its deployment of violence and the use of occult powers. As an alternative order *Issakaba* unconstitutionally appropriates the state's monopoly of violence. The youth group unilaterally arrests, interrogates, prosecutes and punishes alleged criminals without recourse to the state. This of course is a travesty of justice in an otherwise normative democratic socio-political civil setup. But the film clearly shows how the state has become complicit with criminal elements in terrorizing, exploiting and dominating the people. The likes of Chief Mbanefo and the divisional police officer represent the Manichean machinations of indigenous political leaders and state functionaries who now deploy the very instruments of civil protection in terrorizing a peaceful civil public legitimately engaged in the daily struggles for survival. This in itself is a significant sign of the collapse of state. As Zartman (1995) puts it, "probably the ultimate danger sign is when the center loses control over its own state agents, who begin to operate on their own

account" (10). In such circumstances, trust between the civil society and the law enforcement agencies collapses. As we see in the film, even when criminal elements are apprehended by the youth vigilante and handed over to the police, convictions are not secured due largely to deliberate procedural irregularities by the police and a corrupt judiciary. And since vigilantes, like anarchists, "often see themselves as substituting for the state, if only for a time, in the pursuit of order" (Abraham 1998, 15-16), they redeploy the very instruments of domination dispensed by the dominating forces. It follows therefore that *Issakaba*'s extra-judicial killings and violence in the film must be judged in relation to the illegal violence dispensed by the state and not in relation to some abstract quintessential processes of the administration of justice which the people within the universe of the movie do not experience in the first place.

Gore and Pratten (2003) have provided a brilliant exegesis of this response by youth. They argue that:

> when disorder, de-centredness and de-coupling emerge by social change and illegitimacy, those who move into action grasp the importance of how cultural patterns are articulated to systems of political domination hence those stepping into the void to re-establish order do so by the knowledge and practice of routine. (239-40)

The aesthetics or archeology of violence in *Issakaba*, and of course also among its real world progenitor Bakassi, must therefore be understood as young people's innovative politics of the restoration of order in postcolonial Nigeria in which they not only evolve new technologies of survival but also restructure the existing

[dis]order. The violent methods of the Issakaba boys such as public beheadings, burning and other forms of instant justice that we see in the film privilege the unique ways that radical youth seeking a parallel order amidst a decadent political economy inserts itself actively as a corrective check within a corrupt judiciary and the police. The premeditated acts of violence and force as deployed by the youth in the film are intended to "speak back" in equal terms and measure to a despicably vicious and ruthless machinery of violence unleashed by armed bandits and their institutional cohorts, the police.

The *Issakaba* vigilante also deploys occult powers and in many ways this recourse to the occult also articulates a new discursive rhetoric for the politics of youth within a collapsed state. There is a certain propensity for instance, to read, and even dismiss this gravitation towards the deployment of occult powers in the movie as a marker of the supposed gulf between "traditional" and/or "primitive" African society on the one hand, and enlightened Western societies, on the other. Along this line it could be argued for instance that the whole activities of the *Issakaba* youth and their methodologies of state policing reflect what some scholars have now argued as the "re-traditionalization of society" in Africa (See Bayart 1993; Chabral and Daloz 1999).[14] But one need only flip through minimum pages of daily newspaper reports in the country to see that the very "civilized" and so-called Western educated political elites are the most avid patrons and promoters of secret occult economies. According to Hanischfeger (2006), "while in the past witchcraft accusations focused on marginal persons,

[14] Mbadinuju argued that Bakassi Boys "were reviving an 'age-long system of [the] people taking care of their defenses'" (cited in Hanischfeger 57).

today people in ruling circles are also implicated" (72). The outrageous stories in daily national tabloids about ritual murders, billionaire fraternities, and occult bonds of political loyalty all revolve around the very people who ought to represent "Western civilization." This new political class is not content with only the perverse and insidious prebendal politics of state; they also prey on the very people they are supposed to protect using occult means. As we see in part II of *Issakab*a, influential business men like Chief Edwin and his friends frequently oil their prosperous business empires through ritual sacrifices of innocent teens (mostly virgins) conducted by the local native doctor, Igbudu. Even notorious criminals in the film like Dangar and his band of criminals depend on another purveyor of occult powers, Chief Ikuku, for protective powers that insulate them from secular routine state policing.

As in the case of violence then, to deal with this subterranean economy of the occult and its predatory politics on innocent citizens, an equal and matching counter technique must be deployed. No sensible and well-meaning security apparatus will fight criminality with lesser weaponry than that which the enemy possesses and deploys. The combination of both physical and occult violence by the Issakaba is thus a pre-emptive aesthetics of state policing mobilized by the boys in rewriting the order of anomie that we witness in the film. In restoring order within the chaotic social landscape of *Issakaba*, the youth vigilante must possess not just the crude will to fight crime, but also the necessary munitions, both spiritual and mechanical, and even in higher measure, to counteract the vicious regimes that it seeks to counterbalance. Since secular institutions of

justice such as the police and the courts lack the enabling powers and means of proving the culpability of the evil forces within the tension-soaked ambience of the film, Issakaba resorts to the very weapons of terror, but one of a higher-measure, mobilized by the criminal elements of society.

At the end of the movie, in spite of the noble pursuits of *Issakaba*, the film concludes on a somewhat ambiguous note. The very forces of change relapse into the evil they seek to exterminate. Nwoke, the assistant to the protagonist, defects from the group and forms his own alternative vigilante gang, sponsored by a small clique of powerful people within the community where Issakaba operates. This substitute group of course becomes a ready weapon of destabilization, not just to the Issakaba boys, but also to the relative sense of order that has been re-established within the universe of the film. Those behind Nwoke of course are Chief Odenwa and other political heavy-weights whose career of predatory politics have been offset by Issakaba. It must be noted however that the film's ending in no way suggests a typically Nigerian phenomenon. Rather, it reflects the very ambiguities that beset private interventionist efforts when the state abdicates its responsibilities to its people. For as Abraham (1998) has noted, "it is typical of vigilantes that they attempt to take the moral high ground, but they may also entertain or covertly develop other agendas" (7). While this is true in the case of *Issakaba* Boys, those other "agendas" that emerge within the universe of the film are in fact fomented and planted by the very people that brought about the destabilization of the civil order which the *Issakaba* boys seeks to restore. What does this tells us? The youth may mobilize their inexhaustible strength and will in

re-ordering an anomic national set-up, but only so much can they succeed if the legitimate source of state power and control is intransigently incapacitated by corruption and ineptitude.

Youth and the New Politics of Cultural Citizenship

In his usual prescient cultural critiques, Achille Mbembe (2000) has unraveled for us the new forms of temporalities and autochthonous domestication of space in much of the political, economic and socio-cultural landscape in Africa. These new temporalities and nascent geographies, Mbembe argues, have arisen due to the weakening relationship between the central state apparatus of most African nations and their citizens (277). In this segment, I have tried to illustrate how these new cultural formations in the ordinary daily life situations of common people are demonstrated through popular cultural representations such as the video films.

I have argued that films such as *Issakaba* allegorize how the Nigerian (African) youth, especially those disillusioned by the decline of state and its consequent failure to guarantee the civil, economic and social entitlements of citizenship, chart new transitional pathways (Jua 2003). Citizenship, Gill and Wallace (1992) have argued, "embodies more than any other concept the notion of rights and obligations of adults in society" (2). As a narrative of the social struggle for security of lives and property, *Issakaba* points poignantly to the "creative potentials of youth… in not only surviving but inventing and restructuring disorder" (Gore and Pratten 240) especially for purposes of securing

their citizenship rights which the state can no longer offer. As Abraham (1998) tells of the nature of vigilantes, they "typically emerge in 'frontier' zones where the state is viewed as ineffective or corrupt, and it often constitutes a criticism of the failure of state machinery to meet the felt needs of those who resort to it" (9). *Issakaba* visually foregrounds how security—political, economic, and social—remains at the very heart of Africa's big problems. As Melissa Leach (2003) puts it, "[c]ivilians in West Africa have heightened needs for security—whether from rebel insurgency, violent crimes, or resource theft" (ix). What *Issakaba* graphically represents therefore is how the youth in most places in sub-Saharan Africa react to the pervasive cultural economy of state insecurity. The film, as a realist historical representation of vigilante justice in Nigeria, replicates the creative efforts of the mass of youth in the subcontinent desperately seeking to extricate themselves from the predatory politics of the day. In doing so, they jettison the normative processes of the administration of justice because those very structures do not protect the common interests of the citizenry anymore. It is perhaps this new logic of the survival of youth in the postcolony that is encapsulated in the engraving on the T-shirt of the leading protagonist in *Issakaba* which reads: "fuck the world and Save yourself."

Gentrification and the Politics of the Urban Underclass: Homelessness and Youth Struggles in *Maroko*

> *...as surplus citizens, youth are not born. They are made by historical circumstances. And rarely as they like.* (Comaroff and Comaroff 24)

The City in Nigerian Video Films

A distinctively recurrent theme that has dominated the scholarship of Nigerian video culture in the past decade or so has been the subject matter of the city and its signification in the video films (Oha 2001; Okome 2002; Haynes 2007).[15] In very broad terms, these emerging city-critiques of the videos point to the exceptionally coded ways in which both the urban experience and visual cultures are mutually interdependent, shaping, inflecting and reconstituting each other (Grabski viii). In specific terms however, they reflect the idiosyncratically complicated and often times ambivalent experience of urban spatiality, especially in developing countries such as Nigeria where "the assumed function of large cities as generators of modernization and development" (Potter 1) has ironically produced domains of uneven growth, social inequities and a general persistence of a culture of socio-economic peripherality (Smith 1996). While late (post)modern cities have been found to be typically the "arenas for the pursuit of unoppressed activities and desires," they also are domains "replete with danger, oppression and domination" (Merrifield and Swyngedouw 4).

Oha's (2001) critique of the city in Nigerian movies encapsulates the above thesis as he demonstrates how the videos rhetorically privilege the habitually ironic social shifts of Lagos, from its status as the landscape of opportunities and social mobility on the one hand, to one of a jungle survival-economy on the other, where law, justice and morality barely exist. Jonathan

[15] This concern with the city as a leitmotif in film is itself not new as a fairly significant range of literature already exists on the inevitable linkages between cinema and the city (See Fitzmaurice 2003).

Haynes (2007) in his own recent essay entitled "Nollywood in Lagos, Lagos in Nollywood," also takes on the very primacy of the urban space in Nigerian video films, pointing poignantly to how Lagos is preeminently both a *context* for the practice of the video art and is also a *social text* for its content, wherein Lagos is presented "as a turbulent and dangerous landscape, where class divisions are extreme but permeable" and where "enormous wealth does not buy insulation from chaos and misery" (131). Taken together, the picture one gets from these exegeses of the Nigerian urban sphere then is that of the city as both a "soft" (flexible) and "hot" (tense) landscape where urban dwellers are always in the process of designing and molding the malleable cityscape to yield personal goals and aspirations (Okome 2002). According to Okome, the video films anatomize an urban spatiality defined by "need" where the denizens of the Lagos metropolitan milieu are frantically driven by "anxious" motivations to achieve economic and social growth irrespective of structural social and economic impediments. These broad theoretical formulations on postcolonial Nigerian urban life and its textualization in contemporary popular culture such as the video films are indeed significant because by hinting at the unique linkages and complexities of urban processes and experience(s), they situate cities (Lagos) at the very heart of any meaningful heuristic of the visual experience of metropolitan life where, as Grabski (2007) has argued, "the urban terrain is conceptualized as both a visual and a discursive field" (ix).

In this segment of my research I propose to contribute to a furtherance of this debate of the city experience in the video films. I want to penetrate the

existing theorizations of urban life in the Nigerian video movies by taking on a distinct anatomy of Nigerian metropolitan experience—one relating to urban housing[16]—a very dismal situation which is becoming an increasing concern of nascent urban sociology about the developing world (See Obudho and Mhlanga 1988; Basu 1988; Onibokun 1989; Main 1990; Potter and Salau 1990; Potter 1991; Gilbert and Gugler 1992; Smith 1996). An examination of most studies on urban housing reveals that though a general knowledge of the metropolitan housing crisis is fairly common, paradoxically factual awareness about the exact cultural processes of the phenomena and its social consequences in terms of the exact experiences of people in those locations are largely unknown (Holzman 1996; DeKeseredy et'al 2003). Furthermore, while enormous scholarly energy has gone into highlighting the consequences of urban housing crises on the lives of adult populations, especially the marginalized poor, very little attention seems to have been paid to the actual social costs of the urban housing debacle on the lives of young people (O'Conghaile 1989; Lee 2003).

I therefore seek to address this scholarly gap by offering a nuanced reading of a recent video film which I hope will not only boost a deep appreciation of the unevenness of postcolonial urban spatiality in cities like Lagos, but also the unique ways in which the urban housing crisis has transformed the poor urban youth into significant spatial actors. Particularly, I propose to offer a reading of *Maroko* which I contend unravels the concretely

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[16] As Gerald Dix has argued in his forward to *Urban Squatter Housing in the Third World,* the global crisis of urban housing calls for solutions anchored on a very deep appreciation of "social and economic requirements and practicalities and less on unsupportable idealism" (vii). See Basu ashok (1988).

gruesome consequences of *urban revitalization* on the lives of Nigerian youth, especially those of impecunious lower-class urban family backgrounds. By drawing these linkages, i.e. between the urban housing crisis and its renewal initiatives by the state, I hope to gesture generally towards the often ignored interrelationships between increased youth involvement in urban crime and socio-economic marginalization.[17]

To be clear, the object of this part of my research is not aimed at legitimizing, valorizing or even romanticizing youth involvement in urban crime. Rather, I seek to facilitate a sociological insight on the intricate but intrinsic interfaces that connect urban poverty and homelessness on the one hand, and the crystallization and metastasization of crime in Nigeria's mega-cities on the other. For as a number of qualitative studies in other places like Canada and the United States have shown, criminal activities generally proliferate rapidly amongst homeless street youth in most metropolitan urban centres (McCarthy and Hagan 1991, 1992; Baron and Hartnagel 1997; Hagan and McCarthy 1997). These studies clearly demonstrate how concentrated urban disadvantages such as exclusionism, forced evictions and displacements, combined with poverty, can breed phenomenal waves of municipal crime, where crime, as DeKeseredy et al (2003) argue, takes the form of "an individualistic solution to the 'experience of injustice'" (12).[18] In hinging the cultural geographies that we examine here therefore, we ultimately aim to unveil not only the deep-rooted social systems that

[17] As I work on this project, newspaper reports in Nigeria indicate a heightened wave of armed robbery in the country mostly performed by young men and women, which has almost brought the entire banking sector to a halt.

[18] As we see in *Maroko*, the protagonist (Fred)'s first response to why he committed willful homicide is his quest for what he simply calls "justice!"

breed social deviance and other "dark" subterranean economies of young people, but also "to unravel the sorts of dialogues required for the construction of social institutions that ensure freedom, equality and social justice for all" (Merrifield and Swyngedouw 3).

Gentrification and Its Consequences: Femi Odugbemi's *Maroko*

Set in Ikota,[19] a resettlement enclave in Lagos, *Maroko* retells the sordid story of the severe agony of the inhabitants of Maroko, a small suburb in Lagos Island, after the demolition of their houses and businesses in 1990 by the military government of Lagos state. Approximately 300,000 people were forcefully evacuated from this area using bulldozers and caterpillars on the 14th of July that year (Peil 1994; Agbola and Jinadu 1997; Davies 2006:101).[20] Explicitly dramatized in *Marako* then is the exceptional ways in which government's persistence with wholesale policies of urban "clearance of what is adjudged blighted areas have made significantly worse the housing problems of the poor" (Agbola and Jinadu 272).

Combining a unique narrative technique of both documentary and feature story-telling, the film recounts the travails of Mr. Fred Obikwero and his family after the infamous Maroko forced evictions. Adopting a typically Sophoclean cause-and-effect plot structure, starting at the end and progressing back to the beginning, the plot begins with a prologue wherein Fred commits willful homicide by murdering a prominent politician, Chief Bayo Adebayo George, who

[19] I will highlight the social significance of this setting latter on in the chapter.
[20] Also see *Lagos Horizon* July 7th, 1990; *Newswatch Magazine* July 30th, 1990.

comes to campaign for votes in Ikota community. In the series of flashbacks in the film Chief George is presented to us as the Urban Planning Expert who initiated the Maroko revitalization project and trenchantly supported government's evacuation of the people in that area. Fred's oral testimony to the interrogating police officer after his arrest now forms the body of the film's narrative. Through visual flashbacks, using shot- reverse-shot, we get to know that the entire story is not so much about Fred as it is about his family—his three children, wife and their subsequent loss on account of the government urban cleansing initiative at Maroko.

As an experientialist visual portrayal of uneven urban spatialities, *Maroko* registers three important social facts about the peculiar contours of urbanism in developing countries such as Nigeria. First, it metaphorically textualizes the social consequences of "over-urbanization" which David Smith (1996) argues creates "impoverished mega-cities," "marginalized people" and general "social disasters" (1). Second, it graphically literalizes the mounting difficulties and fragmentized biographies which young people that belong to the urban underclass have begun to encounter on the tortuous transitions to adulthood—that is, if at all they make it to adulthood. Third, and most importantly, it captures eloquently the subversive character of urban development processes in Nigeria in which urban planning exercises generally lay claims to equitable distribution of national/regional resources between competing groups, but in reality it never really operates that way (Gilbert and Gugler 2; Main 20; Atkinson and Bridge 2005). As Gilbert and Gugler have noted, every so often, the elites who wield

"political power influence[d] planning decisions against the interests of the powerless" (Gilbert and Gugler 2).

Global and Local Forces

It is imperative to make the vital point however that the processes which we seek to interrogate here cannot be fully understood without situating them in broader international socio-economic contexts. As David Smith (1996) has argued, a fuller apprehension of the peculiar social dynamics and structures of cities in the developing world must begin:

> with an attempt to situate these places in the global political economic system and from there, to explore the 'articulations' between that seemingly very abstract level, and national and municipal dynamics ultimately linking with what happens 'on ground' in the local neighborhoods where people live. (2)

The vital point of entry here of course is the history of Lagos and its emergence as a mega-city.

Like most African cities, Lagos has had a prolonged entanglement with global socio-economic processes—industrial capitalism and western modernization trends. And while it may not have acquired its status as an urban settlement only in the mid-nineteenth century, as is usually assumed, [21] it first gained prominence as an urban nexus in 1861 as the colony of Lagos. Located on

[21] As Bill Freund (2007) has ably demonstrated in his historical study of the African city, urban settlement in the continent goes as far back as the sixteenth Century. He notes that these urban settlements "were almost certainly far smaller and far less characterized by commercial and artisanal activity" before the frenzied activities of European traders, missionaries and governments but that "they certainly existed" (15).

the coastal shore just on the trans-Atlantic route, it became a colonial nerve-centre functioning as the nodal point for imperial political, military, economic, religious and cultural activities (Mabougunje 1962; Simon 22). For young urban futurists seeking economic prosperity, new knowledge, adventure and the experience of new life (modernity), the city of Lagos has long held a strong fascination. But as David Simon notes, "[c]ities do not have a life of their own; …they are a particular manifestation, and form an essential component, of wider political, economic, social and cultural networks and relations" (5). The centrifugal force of Lagos is traceable to other global forces linked to global economic restructuring associated with post-Fordism and late capitalism.

As Lagos assumed an alluring urban personality pulling young people from all over the country as the promised-land of industrial, commercial and even intellectual activities and opportunities, its demographic dynamics were radically altered. So while studies on most Western metropolitan cities have shown Counter-urbanization and demographic de-concentration trends (Berry 1976; Champton 1989), especially since the 1970s, the case in Lagos, as with most African cities, has been a persistent urban demographic explosion (Stren and White 1989; Falola and Salm 2005; Godwin 2006). The direct consequence of the flood of people besieging Lagos in search of jobs, education and other forms of social opportunities has thus been the serious congestion of the urban space, sparking a huge crisis in management of infrastructural facilities (White 1989). Onibokun (1989) has of course observed that inadequate housing "appears to be one of the most serious problems arising from [these] high rates of urbanization

[in Nigeria]" (71). In a frenzied attempt to control the crisis, both federal and state governments have embarked on *gentrification* projects supposedly with the aim of checking the chaos and reinstalling order in the midst of apparent urban management crisis (On the concept of "Gentrification" See Smith and Williams 1986; Nelson 1988; Hutchison 1992; Smith 1996; Atkinson and Bridge 2005; Lee, Salter and Wyly 2008). The Maroko saga in Lagos is a direct fall-out from these government efforts.

But again we must read projects of urban cleansing/reinvention such as Maroko within a certain local political and global economic climate. As the colonial structures of governmentality and commerce[22] were transferred to the indigenous political elites, African cities assumed huge cultural significance as symbols of new-found power for the local elites; hence the need for their "renewal," to reflect this newly acquired political capital (Myers 328). Conscious of the increasing globalization of trade and investments, most African cities like Lagos have had to be "redesigned" by government as a way of gaining "competitive advantage" over other African cities by attracting external investment in industry and trade (Murray and Myers 5). But however well-intentioned, most postcolonial gentrification projects as we shall see in our analysis of *Maroko* do not take into cognizance the larger socio-economic implication of their execution for common people (Abdoul 2005: 236; Murrey and Myers 2006:2). Every so often, the desperate pursuit of a "more efficient and conducive [atmosphere] for the generation of wealth and social dividends"

[22] These structures, mostly installed by colonial forces, were of course embedded with intrinsically divisive social structures

(Enwezor et al 2002:13) in postcolonial cities like Lagos has meant the deliberate exclusion and displacement of ordinary citizens, especially those of the so-called underclasses. The result, as elsewhere in the continent, has been the "growth of irregular settlements, predominantly on the perimeter" (Simon 10) and an increasing population of the urban poor taking shelter in those marginal spaces (also see Yadav 1987; UN 2003; Davies 2006). What does this trend portend for the life of young people in Nigerian urban centres?

Homelessness and Youth Agency: the Visual Rhetoric of *Maroko*

Given only a 7-day ultimatum, Fred Obikwero is ill-prepared for the catastrophic upsurge that uproots him and his family from a fairly stable life of almost a decade. Left with few awkward options, Fred and his family resort to squatting (with in-laws in another suburb in the outskirts of Lagos). But it is only a matter of days before Fred moves his family again, as their squatting space becomes inhospitable due to the hostile attitude of their hosts. Unable to find alternative accommodation, Fred takes refuge in an uncompleted building with his family. This move is significant because it highlights Susan Ruddick's thesis about *subversion* as the peculiar *tactic* of the homeless, where they often "subvert the meaning of structures that were not intended for them, [i.e.] where they would otherwise 'have no business', except by virtue of their subversive activity" (357).[23] This tactic by the homeless and the homeless youth amongst them is indeed significant because it calls attention to a new politics of the negotiation of

[23] She cites the peculiar example of sleeping in movie theatres to buttress her point.

urban spatiality where vast and diverse informal economies take shape as a way of navigating an irregular urban spatiality where stupendous wealth and egregious poverty live side by side. As a visual symbolization of the ruthlessness of postcolonial urbanity, *Maroko* narrates the sudden transformation of once stable and happy families to "transient households," without fixed addresses and sustainable income (UN xxvi). As we witness the gradual but sure deterioration of the welfare of Fred's children, we not only come face-to-face with the ghastly consequences of urban displacement on children and youth but also what Jencks and Mayer (1990) have characterized as the "social consequences of growing up in poor neighborhoods."

First is the issue of health, and a tremendous amount of literature already exist which points to the health dangers that homelessness poses to the wellbeing of transient families and individuals (See Wright and Weber 1987; Wright 1989; Hagan and McCarthy 1997; Hwang et al 1997). According to Gerald Daly (1997) the mortality rate for "homeless people is about three to four times greater than the rate for the total population" (118). This phenomenal death rate is attributable to both the physical and psychological strains that derive from homelessness—unhealthy environments, bacterial and viral infections, poor nutrition and the stigma of being without a home (Daly 117). But it is in *Maroko* that we also encounter the very fatal health implications of homelessness on the lives of young people which critical literature rarely reflects upon.[24]

[24] For an exception see Hagan and McCarthy (1997).

As the rains come down directly on the Obikweros in their roofless squatter abode, a long shot zooms in on Fred's last son, Peter, approximately between the ages of 8 and 10. Tucked beside a shutter-less window and shivering, we are in no doubt that he is suffering from a combination of possible ailments (malaria, typhoid, pneumonia, etc.) resulting from his exposure to harsh environmental conditions. This touching image amplifies Daly's observations about Wright's (1989) argument that among children in homeless families "chronic physical disorders occur at approximately twice the rate of occurrence among ambulatory children in general" (118). Much younger, Peter is unable to cope with the very dreadful and inclement surroundings in which he finds himself. Unable to raise money for immediate medical attention for Peter the boy expires in his mother's arms, his future and dreams muffled by the very society and nation that ought to protect him.

When the camera zooms in minutes later on a piteous Amaka (Fred's wife), we are in no doubt that her son's death has taken its toll on her; and that it is only a matter of time before she gives up on the insufferable situation. Indeed she abandons her family soon after, leaving behind her two children (Uche and James), and it is not long before the lives of these two also spiral downward towards an irreversible fatal end. To support their now ailing father, Uche turns to a "night time economy" (Chatterton and Hollands 2) predominated by life in the bars/pubs, clubs and sex-trade while her younger brother James descends into an underground economy of violent crime. The life paths now blazed by these fractured youth are a tacit testimony to Marx's declaration that though "young

adults make their own nightlife," it is often "not under conditions of their own choosing" (Qtd. in Chatterton and Hollands 8). Perhaps this is what Jean and John Comaroff (2005) meant when, in their reflection on contemporary African youth, they quipped that as citizens, youth are often made by historical circumstances, but "rarely as they like" (24).

A highly charged stream of criminological thought has already gone into rationalizing multiple pathways to crime and criminal behavior. These theories can be categorized in three broad categories: the general/static school, the developmental model, and the general/dynamic paradigm. Theorists of the general/static framework argue that crimes and those that commit them are attributable to explanatory factors that are *constant* across diverse situations and criminal conduct which require two things: "(1) an opportunity to engage in them and (2) an inadequately restrained person who is unable to resist the obvious and momentary benefits and gratification that such acts provide" (Paternoster and Brame 50).[25] The developmental model however asserts that varied factors such as changes in circumstances and external influences on people have a huge effect on criminal conduct in different places and at different times.[26] The third school (Paternoster and Brame 1997) occupies a somewhat "middle ground" between the two extreme theoretical molds. Whichever model we patronize, however, each can help us explain the powerful hinge between multiplicities of urban injustices and the propagation and proliferation of youth crime. With particular reference to youth, for instance, Patterson et al (1989) argue that criminal peers have a serious

[25] Also see Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990).
[26] See Loeber and Leblanc (1990).

impact on the problem behavior of their contemporaries by providing under-socialized children with the "attitudes, motivations and rationalizations to support antisocial behavior" (331).

The rich body of existing studies on street youth mostly suggests that the circumstance of homelessness is highly criminogenic (Baron and Hartnagel 410; Wyly and Hammel 740; Hagan and McCarthy 1997). This argument provides a sociological foundation for reading what becomes of James in *Marako*. At an impressionable age (about 15 years) and thoroughly under-socialized due to the family disruptions he has experienced, James becomes a time bomb waiting to be detonated at the behest of Tinge, another youthful destitute who becomes friends with him around their new neighborhood. For instance, a trunk shot leads us to another uncompleted building where we see Tinge coaching James on how to smoke marijuana and later luring him with small gifts like T-shirts. The recourse to hard drugs here is significant because, as Baron and Hartnagel (1997) have observed, the shift from normal innocent life to a subculture of crime and violence always begins with the utilization of drugs and alcohol (413). They argue that both drugs and crime are mutually inter-dependent because crime helps finance drug use and drug use in turn "encourages profit-making crime to support an ever-growing pattern of use....while making risky and otherwise difficult offences psychologically easier" (413-4). So while it is obvious to the viewer that James is a novice to hard drugs and thoroughly uncomfortable with their use, Tinge pressures him, knowing that he needs their influence to deal with the difficult psychological challenges associated with the underground economy to

which he plans to initiate the unsuspecting teen. Here we concretely encounter how "high-rate offenders" recruit, initiate, pressure and support less experienced accomplices into the underworld of crime (Reiss and Farrington 1991).

A similar causal trend with identical outcomes also trails the life of Fred's eldest daughter, Uche. She is indoctrinated by her friend (Joy) into a night-time-economy in pubs and clubs where she meets with rich patrons trading sex for money, so that she can buy food for the family and indeed later rents a cozy three-bedroom flat for her father and brother. In a quantitative study involving 40 homeless youth in four Midwestern states in the US, Tyler and Johnson (2006) indicated that many young people "had traded sex for things they had deemed necessary in order to survive (i.e. food, shelter, money, or drugs)" (208).[27] As one of the many survival strategies deployed by homeless or displaced youth, sex-trading is always often associated with friends that have traded sex who now become motivators for the novice (Hagan and McCarthy 1997). As with Uche and Joy, the experienced Joy becomes Uche's mentor/tutor, transmitting "skills that constitute forms of criminal capital" (156) in a world where young people are left to their own wits. For both Uche and her brother James, criminal mentoring becomes part of the entire process through which, as Hagan and McCarthy argue, "opportunities are transformed into action" (156).

How might one interpret these events in *Maroko*, which a casual viewer might conceive of as signs of generational *moral degeneration? Attribution* and

[27] For similar arguments also see Ruddick (1998), 354. Tyler and Johnson's study, though set in the US, bear an uncanny similarity to what we see in the character of Joy and Uche in *Maroko* and I think it tells us a lot not just about the global situation of youth but also the identical cultural formations that they evolve when confronted with the challenges of survival

agency theories might be one way to make sense of the lives of the young people in this video film. The attribution theory contends that people generally attribute their social conditions to outer forces. And these attributions, Baron and Hartnagel (1997), argue, "affect emotional reactions and together, as well as individually, determines action" (412). And the commonest form attributions, Cloward and Ohlin (1960) notes, is "the attribution of the cause of failure to the social order rather than to oneself."[28] Social conditions like homelessness, poverty and unemployment, especially when instigated by a powerful external force such as the state, always breed discontent and the need for revenge. The recourse to violent offenses such as we see in *Maroko* is undoubtedly attributable to not just deprivation but also feelings of inequality and social marginalization where grinding poverty and phenomenal wealth live side by and the tenuous line between them is not based on merit but on clientelism and patrimonial networks. Apart from Mr. Obikwero's actions, which comes from his belief that the town planning consultant is responsible for the loss of his family, his children also attribute their social problems to an uncaring society and hence they turn on the same society for their vendetta.

For her own part, Uche's choice might perhaps be rewardingly read as *agencial*. Abbink (2005) has argued that "'agency' response …emphasizes the active role of youth in finding their own answers to the problems they face, and thus having them shape their ovn destiny" (8). The new life path Uche blazes may not be necessarily upright when placed against the normative moral

[28] Qtd. in Baron and Hartnagel 412

imaginary of the popular public, but it signals the new vocabulary of both survival and resistance by the underprivileged young who have been pushed to the very precarious edge of society without legitimate options. To take charge of her own life and to reinvent the very insecure circumstances of her family, she deploys the only resources within her reach in restoring a certain normalcy to the rhythm of their scattered lives.

Furthermore, the cultural politics Uche negotiates are indeed curious, for it is not simply that of outright resistance but that of "clearing a space" (to borrow Appiah's phrase) for survival in the midst of a clogged and unjust urban landscape. Darren Smith (2007) for instance has tried to examine the continuities of gentrification by examining the "relationships between higher education …students and contemporary urban change in Great Britain," focusing on how "processes of studentification[29] may be instrumental to the "(re)production of *gentrifiers* within provincial urban locations" (143). He argues that as "boosters" of gentrification like realtors, estate agents, mortgage banks and other affiliated publicists in the housing industry encourage new patronages in middle class housing, especially amongst students, they create a new urban class of future *gentrifiers* with a strong taste for middle class housing. These "apprentice gentrifiers" are more likely to continue the projects of urban renaissance in the future. In fact, as Marco Oberti (2007) has shown, the very deliberate location of schools within gentrified urban spaces points not only to lingering urban inequalities in local configurations but also its prolongation.

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[29] On the concept of "studentification" see Darren P. Smith in R. Atkinson and G. Bridge (2005.

But I want to argue that it is also possible to see how those who have suffered from the unscrupulous and devious activities of urban cleansing exercises also struggle for themselves, their children and/or family in general never to experience those horrid circumstances again. For instance, as Uche's economy improves from sex-trading, she returns to Ikota, a government estate where approximately 917 families from Maroko were resettled (See *Lagos Horizon,* July 1990; *Newswatch Magazine*, July 1990) to procure and lavishly furnish a three-bedroom flat for her father and brother. This choice does not emanate from being a "family gentrifier" (Karsten 2003). Rather it derives from experiencing the ugly side of gentrification and from the often desperate quest never to experience it again. Since cities are arenas of social change (from poverty to wealth or vise versa), those who have been victims of gentrification consciously struggle to escape the painful pangs of its inconsiderate viciousness. Once they "make it," they often return to the very place from which they were banished by powerful social forces to re-experience the very life the system sought to occlude them from.

Conclusion: Young People and Uneven Urban Landscapes

As we witness the actual historical demolition of Maroko from news footage which has been edited into the film, we are reminded of Neil Smith's (1996) thesis of the revanchist city. In reading the gentrification project in Tompkins Square Park in New York, he has argued that the trend was indicative of how conservative urban middle-class bourgeois were seeking *revenge* against

people they imagined had stolen the city from (or were struggling for it with) them. This reading, though set in the United States, can fruitfully be brought to bear on the real Maroko saga and even the way we experience it in the video film. Smith's reading essentially reflects the contours of global tensions between a rising upper and middle class elite, their postmodern capitalist expansionist agendas and working class populations and their suburban spaces. Both the federal and Lagos state governments had claimed that Maroko was unsafe for its inhabitants as it lay 1.5 metres above sea level and was thus prone to flooding and consequent submergence. Furthermore, it agued that the inhabitants were squatters on government land and that the place was unkempt and posed a health hazard to the general public (Agbola and Jinadu 1997: 279). But the truth behind the forced evacuation, as Agbola and Jinadu reveal, really had a revanchist motive: Maroko was located uncomfortably close to the highly priced lands and properties of Ikoyi and Victoria Island and was regarded as an eyesore by these high-income neighborhoods. The fear of epidemics and high crime rate associated with Maroko did not endear its residents to its wealthy neighbours. Even worse perhaps, from their perspective, was the reduction in property values in Ikoyi and Victoria Island due to Maroko's proximity. However, even more compelling than these reasons was the need for more land as land in both Ikoyi and Victoria Island has been partitioned and repartitioned to its limits. Maroko was the next logical place for outward expansion but this was only possible once the inhabitants had been evicted (279). The Maroko cleansing exercise thus had a revanchist undertone and motive as the right-wing urban political elites and military big-

wigs perceived its residents as those struggling for land with them, and hence they needed to be punished by being "cleared out."

But all these events, which mark social trends that have come to signify what Merrifield and Swyngedouw (1997) have appropriately termed the "urbanization of injustice[s]" do not always go unchallenged. As many African states and their economies are being "hemmed in" by both global and local forces with "serious conditions of decline" in almost every sector (Callaghy and Ravenhill 17), causing serious problems in the personal lives and social experiences of both its adult and youth populations, innovative, and oftentimes extra-legal strategies of survival are taking shape in the urban sphere. Be it in the area of housing and land use (as we see in *Maroko*), employment (as in *Living in Bondage*, security (as in *Issakaba*), transportation (*One Chance*) or other social services, the urban terrain is increasingly being dominated by the informalization of the economy (Hart 1973, 2001; Meagher 1995; ILO 2002: Hansen and Vaa 2004). According to Hart (2001), the informal economy is actually "nothing less than the self-organized energies of people, bidding their time to escape from the strictures of state rule" (157). As African cities like Lagos shift from chronic "dependency" to devious "marginality" (Stren and Halfani 2001), the "creative class"—the energetic young men and women such as we see in *Maroko,* situate themselves at the very head of the emerging informal responses to failed states and economies.

As global forces of late capitalism in the form of gentrification, combined with autochthonous marginalization(s), preclude subsidiary urban groups such as

young people and their families from gaining access to safe housing, secured jobs and other social services, they become truly active "spatial actors" in an uneven urban landscape (Gatham 2003). As a visual testament to what Gotham calls the "spatiality of urban poverty," *Maroko* and *Issakaba* represent how subordinate groups develop "'hidden transcripts' that represent a critique of power and strategy of resistance that is covert, disguised and relatively anonymous" (Gotham 728). This social reality points to the fact that the urban space, as Hansen and Vaa (2004) have argued, "is not so much a product of an overall regulatory system as it is a dynamic field of interaction for economic, social, cultural and political processes" (8).[30] And as we see in both *Maroko and Issakaba,* youth stand poignantly at the very centre of this cultural geography. Young people may lose their lives in the struggle for a decent place to live as we see in *Maroko* or communal security [as in *Issakaa]*,[31] but their struggles tell us that they are not just passive people waiting to be acted upon by overwhelmingly suppressive urban forces. Rather, they are active spatial actors and cultural producers experiencing and responding to both exogenous and local forces, thus not only resisting but also shaping and reinventing the urban cultural geography (Abbink and Kessel 2005; Honwana and De Boeck 2005)—whether for better or for worse is something else for us to rethink altogether.

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[30] I think this is the kernel of Okome's (2002) interpretation of the city in the video film which I referenced in the introduction.

[31] James finally dies as he is shot in one of his robbery adventures and Uche dies of HIV contracted from her participation in the survival sex-trade.

Chapter Four

Gendered Spaces: The Urban Sphere, Female Youth and Postcolonial Struggles in Nigerian Video Film

> *If we are to have any relevance to women and girls outside the movement today we have to learn what they are thinking and how they experience a patriarchal and sexist society* (McRobbie 2000: 128).

Preamble: Gender and Youth Culture Studies

One major trend that has characterized the scholarship of youth culture generally, especially since the 1990s, is the renewed interest in female youth and their distinctive cultures. This is not to suggest however that specific scholarly attention to female youth cultures was non-existent before the 1990s. More than three decades ago, Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber initiated the discourse of "girls' subcultures" in the now canonical Birmingham text on youth subcultures.[1] But even this heraldic discourse of the politics of the female youth was itself an agitation against what the authors considered to be the generally pervasive marginalization of feminist discourse within the broader scholarship on youth. They noted a certain worrisome sexual apartheid in the contemporaneous debates about young people, arguing that in many ways girls were flatly invisible in the cultural critiques about young people and that whenever they appeared at all, they often did as appendages, that is, in subordinate roles often cast "in terms of their sexual attractiveness" (McRobbie 12).[2]

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[1] See Hall and Jefferson's *Resistance through Rituals,* 1976.

[2] These pioneers of feminist youth scholarship argued that whenever females appeared in youth culture discourses, they did as usable and disposable subjects, mostly as girlfriends or as other symbolic apparels to masculine power.

This chronic absence of the female youth from within the bourgeoning scholarship on youth was indeed strange and ironic because in many ways girls were central to the animating myths and moral panics about young people in the 1950s, which centered on such cultural issues as consumerism, sexual libertarianism/expressivity, obsessive hedonism and even radicalism. McRobbie and Garber therefore argued that girls were actually "present" within youth cultures but deliberately made "absent" because pioneer sociological research was begun and dominated by privileged white middle-class males, and much of their intellectual inquiries about youth cultures emphasized only "the violent aspects of the phenomenon," from which most girls were often "excluded" (McRobbie 15).

The prolonged exclusion of young women from youth culture studies or debates implied—erroneously—that young women were insulated from the mounting socio-economic challenges that young people had begun to face all over the world, especially beginning from the 1980s. The renewed interest in female youth, their distinct social experiences and the cultures they formulate to deal with those experiences therefore challenged scholars to rethink anew the exceptional ways in which social categories such as gender, race, age, class, nationality, religion and many other exclusionary social categories affected the experience(s) of young people around the world.

And while research into these social asymmetries is crucial, there is also an urgent need to refocus attention on the distinctive responses that these different social segments are mobilizing in responding to the new marginalizing social conditions that have radicalized the experiences of young people all over the

world. According to Zak and Moots (1983), while we aspire to deconstruct what they call "the sexual economy"[3] in cultural discourses, we must "however, guard against viewing women merely as passive victims, a view that places women outside history" (134). Girls, like their male counterparts, have equally been affected by and have responded innovatively and powerfully, whether for good or for bad, to shifting socio-economic circumstances which have begun to affect the lives of young people universally. But since girls do not experience their life transitions in similar ways to their male counterparts, it is imperative to begin to reflect upon and unravel how they "respond to the material constraints imposed on their lives" (McRobbie 2000, 45). In other words, we need to begin to reflect on and interrogate how the exceptional ways in which "gendered spaces" (Spain 1992), that is, how those temporal and spatial "relations of power and powerlessness" (McRobbie 2000, 121-22), impact upon young women's lives in specific institutional frameworks such as the family, school, work, and the society at large.

Although the vast contemporary cultural domain presents multiple sites to do this new historiography that we propose here, the mass media and popular culture is one fruitful site to turn to, and for very good reasons too.[4] Countless critical insights are emerging about how empowered female subjectivities and new cultural formations of resistance are being formed by female youth through

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[3] By sexual economy the authors are referring to normative social structures and arrangements across time and space that shape and limit improved socio-economic possibilities for women.

[4] According to McRobbie (2000), the mass media, especially cinema/film, "have traditionally been the …spheres of public leisure where women have always dominated" (62). Indeed, women have been the centre-piece of most visual narratives. For instance, at the very heart of the first cinema feature (*The Birth of a Nation*) was the social experience of a teenage girl supposedly threatened by the phallocentricism of black male patriarchy.

different forms of media and pop culture such as feminist magazines and zines (Leonard 1998; Tait 2003); films (Robin and Jaffe 1999; McRobbie 2000; Pomerance 2001; Gateward and Pomerance 2002; Stephens 2003; Mallan 2003; Owen, Stein and Vande Berg 2007); fashion (Hartley and Lumby 2003, Pini 2004), and the likes. These critical insights not only privilege significant "understanding of the diversity and commonalities of women's experiences and of the roles of space and place in shaping those experiences" (Katz and Monk 04), they also reflect what Kerry Mallan (2003) has described as a new "girl power discourse" (139) in which women have taken center stage within the global cultural sphere.

In this chapter, I propose to further an understanding of contemporary architectures of girls' cultures in the postcolonial life-course trajectory by exploring visual representations of the exceptional challenges of social change on the biographies of young Nigerian females, focusing particularly on both the local and transnational urban sphere and the spectacular rise of the new sexual commerce. Although some critical insights on gender in the video films have already been broached (Garritano 2000; Okome 2000; 2004; Anyanwu 2003; Harding 2007; Mohammed 2007), pointing poignantly to the exceptional ways in which these visual textualizations represents what Ukadike (1999) sees as an irredeemably patriarchal society which "redirects against women the exploitative mechanisms and attitudes that themselves have endured" (Qtd in Robin and Jaffe 11), none addresses quite specifically the visual representations of women in the videos from the specific point of view of youth culture. I therefore want to extend

the gender debate on the videos by bringing in a distinctively "gender-sensitive-lens" (Delaet 1999: 2) on the youth dynamics in the video films, demonstrating how these films allegorize exclusively female youth struggles, urban subjectivities and agency, and ultimate "girl power," especially within the precariously shifting contours of a nebulous African urban modernity.

The New Transnational Movements, Gender and the Global Economy

In recent years there has been a renewed debate around the issue of transnational migrancy culture and how it intersects with issues of identity (Castels and Miller 1998; Chambers 1994). I tap into this issue in this chapter because I believe it offers one of the most fruitful cultural sites through which countless young women in developing countries all over the world come to experience what Ian Chambers (1994) has described as "the violence of alterity" (4). My goal in this chapter is to demonstrate how this marginalized social positioning overlaps with other larger socio-economic histories that are immediately unrecognizable within the immediate narrative template of popular cultural representations such as the video films and hence lost to the average viewer. I will argue that to experience that moment of "violence" (especially for young women), is essentially to encounter what Chambers himself describes as the "language of powerlessness and the potential intimations of heterotopic futures" (6-7), particularly as often experienced from the storms of a slippery modernity whose civilization is essentially marked by fluidity, unpredictability, inequality and rapid social changes (Baumann 2000).

Caren Kaplan (1996) has for instance argued that while discourses of transnational travel and the consequent displacement and alienation that come with it continue to multiply, it must be noted however that all displacements are not experienced in the same way. In other words, not only do "women experience modernity in varied and complex ways" (Kaplan 152), they do not "experience migration in precisely the same way as men" (Delaet 2), hence theories of transnational mobility (or travel), globalization, modernity and Diaspora experience ought to pay attention to those social factors such as gender, age, race, place and other dichotomizing cultural dynamics that continue to define the experiences of young women in very fundamental ways, especially those from postcolonial polities such as Nigeria.

The renewed interest in transnational migration in itself should not be mistaken for an entirely new social phenomenon, nor are reasons for its re-emergence in contemporary cultural discourse mysterious. As Hatton and Williamson (2005) have argued, people migrate "today to improve their lives and they did it for the same reason two centuries ago" (1). The significant point however is that the contexts in which contemporary migratory cultures have begun to unfold are indeed different. The radical restructuring of the global economy has resulted in what Van Hear (1996) calls the new macro political economy; that is:

> the distribution of power and resources globally and regionally, reflected in the structure and distribution of production and consumption; in patterns of trade and financial flows; in the development of transport and

communication; in the distribution of military might; and in population, environment and other elements of global imbalance. (16)

The direct effects of these unequal distributions of economic, technological, political and cultural resources mean that social opportunities predominate in some locations and not in others. The current international migratory trend then is one in which the overconcentration of economic opportunities in one part of the world (the North) has continued to pull economic migrants looking for the "good life" from another part of the globe (the South). Needless of course to point out that at the heart of this global transnational cultural trend is the "young adult, exactly those who are most responsive to emigration incentives" (Hatton and Williamson 2; also see Monzini 6).

Of particular interest in the new discourse of transnational migration are the huge mobility rates from third world countries in Africa. Numerous organization and scholars are now beginning to turn their attention to the new patterns of movement from Africa and the diasporic cultures of young migrants from the continent (Lindsay 1985; NOMRA 1998; de Bruijn, Van Dijk and Foeken 2001; Kanadu-Agyemang, Takyi, and Arthur 2006; Hamilton 2007: Falola and Afolabi 2008). Nigerians particularly are said to be at the head of these transnational movements, constituting roughly about 17 percent of the African population of global migrants, followed only by Ethiopia with just 13 percent (Falola and Afolabi 5). In spite of the frenzied economization of the global economy with increased movement of people and capital across nations, most African countries such as Nigeria have remained poor, held down by the lingering

chains of structural adjustment since the 1980s. This inclement economic atmosphere created by SAP has animated the new migration movements of young people (Takyi and Konadu-Gyemang 15). The increasing international economic inequalities between nations that produce wealth in one place and poverty in the other, and an inept and viciously exploitative political leadership at home have all conjoined to propel young people to move out to new spheres of economic betterment (Okome 30-31; Lindsay 1985).

And while women used to be invisible in traditional discourses of transnational movement, they are now said to be at the very centre of the global transnational movement (Delaet 1999). There is growing evidence of the increased outflow of both highly professional and unskilled women to countries of the north from sub-Saharan countries such as Nigeria (Adepoju 7) and enthusiastic scholarly attention is beginning to focus on the peculiar experiences and coping strategies of these women (Angel-Ajani 2006; Roth and Speranza 2000; Zlotnik; Minada 2004; Flynn 2004). The reasons for this dramatic movement away from the continent, as I have already shown, are traceable to a constellation of factors that are political, economic, and socio-cultural, but the most palpable remains the economic motive (Delaet 6).

Economic globalization and the attendant socio-economic inequalities that come with it have now resulted in the explosive migration of young women from developing countries seeking new niches of survival abroad, and mostly through sex work (Thorbek and Pattanaik 2002). While some move willingly, others are trafficked, tricked or even forced to migrate abroad for the sole purpose of

generating income for dangerous rackets through commercial sex work (McCabe 2008; Ebbe and Das 2008; Cumming 2008; Monzini 2005; Melrose and Barret 2004; King 2004; Bruckert and Parent 2002). The real problem however is that this sordid global trend, its mechanism of operation and its victim have remained relatively invisible, creating real problems for effective solutions by governments and concerned human rights activists. But as Marjorie Stone (2005) has asked:

> [H]ow are contemporary writers, dramatists, and film-makers using the resources of their art to explore the nature of trafficking or the subjective experience of being trafficked into slavery, and how might such cultural representation contribute to [understanding and] developing effective anti-trafficking strategies? (36)

This chapter demonstrates how Nollywood has responded to this new economy of transnational sexual commerce and explores how youth are implicated in this dubious underground economy (willfully or by force), thus creating a new generation of postcolonial victims whose futures have truly been fractured, or are at best, tethering at the edge of a nebulous and precarious global socio-economic politics.

Postcolonial Cinema, Transnational Mobility and New Identity Politics

Enthusiastic scholarly attention has begun to triangulate the linkages between postcolonial cinema, modern-day transnational migrancy and diasporic cultural formations. These new studies attempt to illuminate the unique ways in which visual representations consciously capture and articulate the unique and

varied complicated processes, experiences, benefits, challenges and even the great paradoxes of the diasporic experience for most third world migrants. Hamid Naficy (1993; 1999; and 2001), Laura Marks (2000) and Nicholas Mirzoeff (2000) have particularly done excellent scholarly exegesis examining the peculiar deployment of diverse media and communication technologies such as film by migrants to producing not only experimental/interstitial and non-mainstream cinemas, but also to reflect the diverse cultural formations inflected by migrants in dealing with the hopes, disappointments and traumas of the transnational exilic experience.

In the main, these critical explorations of media and diasporic cultures privilege fresh understandings of "new experiences and subjectivities and perhaps new ways of being and belonging" (Bailey, Georgiou and Haridranath 1) in a world driven crazy by its own mechanisms of growth and development. Writing in the introduction to a book of essays entitled *Moving Pictures, Migrating Identities,* Eva Rueschmann (2003) notes that the collection particularly explores:

> the ways cinema projects the many disjunctures and contradictions of exile and diaspora—the complicated meaning of "home," the exile's nostalgia for origins, the hopes and tragedies of border crossings, the difficulties of belonging to a strange society and being a "stranger."(x)

At the heart of this new scholarship generally is the real social "challenge of negotiating multiple cultural identities, and the conundrum of gender for the migrants, especially women's conciliation of cultural pasts and futures" (x).

A fairly rich amount of Nigerian videos films have also begun to take on the theme of transnational migration by young people, but no critical scholarly attention, at least none that I know of, has addressed this aspect of the video dramas. Most films such as *Glamour Girls* I & II, *American Visa* I & II, *Struggle for Abroad* and other such video titles attempt to visually capture the harrowing experiences and challenges faced by the countless young men and women who struggle to leave the country or have left the country for the perceived better economic opportunities in North America and Europe. While these visual imaginings of the diasporic experience of young people continue to multiply through different media, there is the urgent need for us to pay attention to the specifics of experience(s). According to Hamid Naficy (1999), because all migrants do not experience transnational movement equally and uniformly, its discourse will thrive only when and if it pays attentions to "detail, specificity, and locality" (4). It is this specificity, especially with particular reference to the female youth and the experience of transnational migration and sex work, which I focus on in this chapter. The films I examine are about young female protagonists whose experiences, like most female characters in African cinema, represent the "personal struggles of one woman whose story has collective significance" (Ukadike 138). While these films are undoubtedly locally situated representations of the social struggles, trials, tragedies and at times, triumphs of young females, they also represent a broader cultural pattern of sordid youth experience and social struggle in sub-Saharan Africa.

I will focus particularly on Kenneth Nnebue's two part video film, *Glamour Girls*. I propose to deploy this film in demonstrating specifically the popularization of transnational mobility culture amongst young women in sub-Saharan Africa. My analysis however will go further to illustrate how these new transnational mobility cultures intersect with new patterns of female sex trafficking, and how these two trends can be linked to both local and global restructuring of the global economy, which in turn has radicalized the experience of young women, especially those in urban Africa. I will also further my argument by connecting my analysis of trans-national migration and sex trafficking in the video films to larger debates around what has now come to be seen as a unique dimension of postmodern urban experience characterized by the radical transformation of intimacies (Giddens 1992; Laumann et al 1994).

Transnational Trafficking in Women and the Commoditization of Sex in *Glamour Girls I & II*

Glamour Girls is one of the very early home movies to come out of Nollywood and in many ways it eloquently represents Jonathan Haynes' (2007) thesis about what he calls the "anatomy of power" in Kenneth Nnebue's movies. But in this movie the "anatomy of power" is one that triangulates those often ignored linkages between sex, money and power. Produced by NEK Video in 1996, it anatomizes the immense aporia of urban life for young women in Nigeria, bringing to light the complicated and often ironic side of the centrifugal forces of globalization and urbanization for young women in developing economies of the so-called third world. Although originally conceived as a cultural representation

of the fallen city woman, the new urban courtesan as an "urban 'other'" (Hubbard 1999, 62),[5] the narrative actually symbolizes the grimy social transcripts of the dreadful side-effects of the intractable crisis of endemic economic stagnation/decline for young women in Nigeria and the new subjectivities that they have begun to develop as inevitable responses to dire socio-economic circumstances.

Infused with other subplots that mirror the nebulous contours of Africa's urban experience, the central kernel of the plot revolves around Sandra (the late Jennifer Osai), a jobless university graduate who moves from a regional city in the South East, to Lagos (Nigeria's mega city) in the South West. After four years in the university and one-year of compulsory national service, Sandra has nothing more than three years of a life of joblessness and mean treatment by different men as her work experience. She then decides to move to Lagos to try her luck in the big city. There, she is introduced to a small clique of urban socialites by a former classmate who now makes good money as a courtesan servicing the sexual desires of the ruling elite. Sandra soon meets a rich politician who pays all her bills including the purchase of a house and a befitting car. She is however oblivious of how she has become a commoditized object that has been secured by a rich politician, prohibiting her from ever being involved in another intimate love relationship. Sandra makes the mistake of falling in love with a younger man; her friend Doris (Gloria Anozie) betrays her to the politician and she is ultimately

[5] In an unpublished interview with a Danish documentary film maker in 2003, Kenneth Nnebue, the producer of *Glamour Girls,* indeed declared that the film was meant to show and discourage the desperation of the new city woman hell-bent on gaining material wealth through the commoditization of her body.

ejected from her exquisitely furnished house by the politician's thugs, her car impounded. Her younger lover disappears, leaving only a letter that says he has gone to meet his childhood love in the United States.[6]

It is in part two of the movie, appropriately subtitled *Italian Connection*, that we are however brought head on with the dark underside of a new order of not just the feminization of transnational migration but also the wholesale commercialization of femininity that has become one of the most pronounced socio-economic trends since the early 1990s. Frustrated and now homeless on account of another three years of joblessness, and desperately seeking for something to ameliorate her dismal economic circumstances, Sandra returns to her old friend Doris who now sits at the head of a powerful underground sex trafficking network in Lagos. Unknown to Sandra, she is now entangled with a vicious transnational prostitution ring that lures her to Italy with the promise of a good job and better life, one supposedly far removed from the travails and anxiety of a precarious urban life in Lagos as we see in part one of the movie.

It is Sandra's transnational movement and her final entanglement with this ruthless sex trafficking racket that ultimately brings us to the fate of a new generation of young girls trapped in Europe's hell-hole of sex work marked by exploitation, violence and modern day slavery. *Italian Connection* is a particularly powerful postcolonial narrative of how both local and international

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[6] What happens to Sandra is a typical representation of a global gendered space in which we often see a double standard whereby men are permitted sexual variety while women are not. The politician's adultery as a married man, keeping a mistress outside his marital home, is perceived as one of those regrettable but "understandable foibles" of men, while Sandra's only relationship as a single girl to another single boy is interpreted as an "unpardonable breach of the law of property" and propriety where discovery brings "highly punitive measures" (Giddens 7).

movements for young women struggling for a better life can become hideous and nasty, trailed by gender objectification and mistreatment. In many ways then the film participates in a broader global discussion about how the feminization of poverty now pulls young women into seeking new niches of survival in precarious zones where they neither have rights as citizens nor protection as humans (Melrose and Barrett 2004; Parrot and Cummings 2008). It particularly denotes the current cultural pattern in which young women now sit at the centre of an increased international migration movement from the poor south to the rich north. Worthy of note is how all the movements by women in the movie, both locally and transnationally, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, are essentially animated by the desire to clinch better economic opportunities which do not exist at the point of departure for the characters. Thus, poverty and the city space—its very precarious contours and allure as a site of economic opportunity for youth—both in the postcolony (Lagos) and the west (Italy), becomes central to the narrative of *Italian Connection*.

Set in both Nigeria and Italy, the film offers disturbing images that resonate with recent scholarly arguments linking globalization, postindustrial mega cities and the phenomenal rise in new survival economies by women (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2004; Zimmerman, Litt and Bose 2006). Saskia Sassen (2006) has particularly drawn on the concept of globalization and global cities in formulating arguments about global gender inequities and the dramatic rise in what she calls "survival circuits" (30). Sassen deploys this concept in hinting at the novel informal and alternative non-mainstream modes of survival

stratagems developed by young women in the face of a global economy in which asymmetrical allocation of economic resources and opportunities has ensured that the rich get richer and the poor, poorer. Zimmerman, Litt and Bose (2006) have particularly noted that although the dominant conception of globalization in our social imagination is one in which "high-profile business travel or video conferencing from one global city to another" has become the order of the day, "in reality, much of the population movements involves workers searching the globe for resources for themselves and their families" (10). Most of these new working class migrants are now women of the underclass from poor countries desperately seeking to make better lives out of their precarious economic situations. This new movements of women from poor to rich countries is what scholars now refer to as the feminization of transnational migration (Anthias and Lazaridis 2000; Castels and Miller 1998; Massey et'al 1999; Sweetman 1998; Willis and Yeoh 2000). Once in global cities in the west however, these new generation transnational migrants, devoid of the indispensable professional skills to function in a competitive and new electronic economy, now take up odd jobs in the informal sectors of the global economy as care workers, domestic servants and sex workers (Momsen 1999; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2004; Zimmerman, Litt and Bose 2006).

It is this idea of "survival circuits," but one particularly related to the large-scale commercialization of women's bodies and sex in global cities that *Italian Connection* portrays. At the heart of the quest for an improved life by young women in *Glamour Girls* is the urban space, but one whose specific

significance is hinged on its place as "facilitator of sexual transactions…" (Laumann et al 2004: 6). Whether in Lagos or in Italy, the sole means of survival for the young women that we encounter in the film is through the commoditization of their bodies and sexuality. And this is not a distinctively Nigerian phenomenon. Enormous and insightful scholarly efforts have already gone into unraveling how transnational sex work has now become a thriving subculture for young women especially from poor countries in Eastern and central Europe, South America, Asia, and the Middle East (McCabe 2008; Ebbe and Das 2008; Cumming 2008; Beeks and Amir 2006; Monzini 2005; Stone 2005; Melrose and Barret 2004; King 2004; Bruckert and Parent 2002).

In Africa, Nigeria is at the forefront of this global dynamic of the trafficking and commercialization of women for sex work and emotional care in Europe and North America (Ejalu 2006; Monzini 2005; Elabor-Idemudia 2003). In Italy, this phenomenon is often subtly referred to as the "Nigerian woman problem" (Monzini vii).[7] Approximately 105, 000 people are trafficked from Nigeria for sex work in Western Europe and North America every year, and Italy and the Netherland are the common destinations (Monzini 2005). And as Elaju (2006) has observed, approximately 60-80 percent of girls involved in the sex trade in Italy are Nigerian youth with an "average age of 15" (177). *Italian Connection* is thus a cultural representation of the sickening but huge global business of the flesh which now constitutes the "third largest moneymaking venture in the world, after illegal weapons and drugs" (Malarek 4).

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[7] See Kevin Bales' forward to Monzini's *Sex Traffic*

But one needs to make the point though that the crisis of transnational sex trafficking of young women as explicitly represented in *Glamour Girls II* is not one entirely disconnected from the failed socio-economic policies in Nigeria since the 1980s. The global economic decline of the 1980s forced most developing countries like Nigeria to resort to short term loans from international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International monetary Fund (IMF). These loans required borrowing nations to restructure their local economies to fit in with the global liberalization order of free trade and competitive markets. So the cutting of costs in relevant areas such as education, health care and other social services, combined with the rationalization of the nation's federal work force, spawned huge unemployment rates and consequent large-scale poverty affecting mostly women, children and youth. The joblessness that we encounter in *Italian Connection* and its reason for the recruitment and abuse of innocent girls in the film had in fact reached its climax by the mid-1990s when the film was released. The film thus puts a precise hand on the subterranean and dangerous cultural economies that had begun to take shape as a response to the postcolonial life of want and chronic scarcity that had become the daily life experience of ordinary young people in the country beginning from the late 1980s onwards. *Italian Connection* therefore offers a poignant visual signature of the social struggle of most young women in most of West Africa where poverty became "the major incentive in forcing people to move to other countries in search of employment and to better lives" (Ejalu 170).

Released in 1996, at a time when the emerging underground transnational business in the trafficking of young women and the commercialization of sex had gained international attention but eluded the surveillance and mitigating efforts of sovereign states and even international organizations such as the United Nations, the movie unraveled the hidden transcripts of a global sex market that had begun to take advantage of the global feminization of poverty by preying on innocent girls all over the third world. Even for early academic researchers interested in having a handle on transnational sex trafficking at the time, the phenomenon posed a huge challenge because most of the pertinent population sample relevant to the study, such as sex workers, traffickers themselves, and their victims/survivors, constituted a "hidden population" that was difficult to identify (Tyldum and Brunovskis 2005:18).[8]

Glamour Girls thus reveals not just the sordid details of a particular instance of the commercialization of intimacy within a specific postcolonial national context (Nigeria), but also the gritty details of the true mechanisms of a transnational vice ring, graphically illustrating the causes as well as the complex processes of recruitment, transportation, exploitation and the enslavement of young girls doing forced sex work in the dark bellies of the world's global cities. As we see in the movie, while Doris is in Lagos recruiting young, beautiful but jobless girls who are desperately searching for alternative avenues of making headway in life for commercial sex work in Western cities, at the other end of the transnational spectrum is Maureen (Dolly Unachukwu), who runs a sophisticated

[8] Also see the introduction to the special issue by Frank Laczko and Elzbieta Gozdziak in the same volume.

escort cum sex brothel in Italy. Both Doris and Maureen fund these new transnational travels by procuring passports, processing visas, flight tickets, and final accommodation in Italy for the girls to work. As soon as the girls arrive in Europe, their passports and other immigration documents are forcefully retrieved and stored away or recycled.[9] While the "madams" gets paid directly for the girls' sexual services, the girls are however responsible for their own general welfare hence "the bonded laborer is made responsible for his or her own upkeep, thus lowering the [modern day] slaveholder's cost" (Bales 17). The film therefore exposes the real mechanisms—mobilization, implementation and insertion/integration (Bruckert and Parent 12)—of a deadly dimension of a new transnational dynamic that has begun to prey on the vulnerabilities surrounding the lives of young women in Nigeria and other marginal economies of the world.

Glamour Girls also goes beyond untying the mechanisms of the emerging objectification and commoditization of young women's bodies, indicating precisely how violence, according to Bales (2004), has become the "one critical dimension" in modern day types of slavery (19). It reveals the brutal force often associated with the social reality of countless young women who are now the victims of an atrocious and wicked intercontinental business in human lives in which innocent teenage girls are manipulated and deceived. The case of Laura in the movie is indeed pertinent in this regard. Laura's parents had taken in Maureen, the new transnational sex trafficking mogul, when her parents died many years ago. From Maureen's own personal confession we know that she was

[9] By recycled I mean a process by which passports once used for entry into the west are sent back to the home countries for other entrants under false names (See Monzini 2005).

pleasantly raised by Laura's parents. Now thriving in the big city (Italy), she returns to Nigeria with enormous gifts of textile and exotic perfume for her benefactors. As a sign of her gratitude, especially at a difficult time when her benefactors had lost their breadwinner (Laura's father), Maureen offers to take Laura (approximately 18 years of age) for further education and ultimately a better life in Italy. In Italy however, Laura comes face to face with the rude realities of her new life and the truly demonic side of her trusted aunty. She is told by a stern-faced Maureen that prostitution is her new life. Laura of course resists this order because she is a neo-Pentecostal faithful. For refusing to obey her new boss, Laura's head is smashed on the wall by the brothel's thug on the orders of Maureen. When the film ends we do not know Laura's final fate; all we know is that Maureen orders the thug to take "this thing," that is, Laura's lifeless body, away. Laura's tragic end in the movie is a classic example of the new global dynamic in international sex trade in which innumerable young women and teenage girls in vulnerable positions from developing countries are tricked into a new model of indentured labour in global cities. It is a concrete narrative of the real life stories of numerous innocent girls whose lives, according to Gilbert King (2004), get "snuffed out by violence and betrayal at the hands of someone they trusted, and sometimes by members of their own families" (8).

The perfunctory manner with which Laura's body is dispensed also tells a lot about how young women now constitute the huge crop of disposable people that make up the new global economy.[10] According to Kevin Bales (1999), the

[10] For more analysis of the idea of the expendability of women see Sunera Thobani (2001).

mass of new disposable people that mark the modern day global economy are unified by their suffering, "among them the abuse and death of their children, the damage to their bodies through trauma and untreated disease, *the theft of their lives and work, the destruction of their dignity, and the fat profits others make from their sweats*" (viii, emphasis added). One particular scene in *Italian Connection* allegorizes this cruel dynamic of the new global economy in the commoditization of sex. Maureen and Vera are both members of the notorious "Women of Substance International."[11] While in Italy, Maureen contacts Vera in Nigeria to get her a young "black girl who could make love to a chimpanzee in a blue movie"[12] being shot by an American film agency. She has been offered $150,000.00 for the deal. Although Vera is initially apprehensive about the health consequences for the young girl who might take on this apparently deadly job, she is however tempted by her own cut of the contract (70% of the total sum). Combined with additional pressure from Maureen, she sends one of her girls (Judith) over to Italy. According to Vera's own account, the poor girl "became a working corpse" after the deal was successfully completed. Instead of trying any medical options to redeem the girl's failing health, Maureen injects Judith to death, arguing that it was a mercy killing. The fate of Judith and countless others in the movie is indeed the real destiny of many young girls who have become the tools and objects for others to make money in the new global sex economy in which profits are prioritized over human lives. It is a cultural portrait of the

[11] As Doris tells us in the film, this is the new club where "you'd meet the women of the new era; the women who rule men; women with power in this country."
[12] These are the exact words of Vera in her account of the deal to the Women of Substance International.

typical scenario in the new global slavery which, according to Bales (2004), not only throws away precious lives once they have been brutally exploited but also "focuses on big profits and cheap lives" (4).

Taken together, then, unlike the glamorized version of transnational sex trafficking that most scholars attribute to *Glamour Girls II*, the film actually uncovers the invisible and dark undersides of a seemingly pleasant worldwide subculture in which young women have become crucial pawns in an emerging economy of desire. And in many ways *Italian Connection* marked the earliest beginnings of Nollywood's engagement with social issues that cut across both local and international lines. It not only unveiled the complex systems and forces associated with the new spectre of sexual exploitation of innocent women that had begun to take shape in the late twentieth Century, but also the rude realities associated with this new phenomenon such as violence, trauma, exploitation, dehumanization, remorselessness, and even racism, and demonstrated how all of these dynamics intersect with a new but asymmetrical global economic and social order that intensifies privileges and hope in one place and chronic scarcity and hopelessness in another. According to Parrot and Cummings (2008), "poverty was and continues to be the key in the development of [the new] sexual slavery" (6). And at the centre of all these (as we see in *Glamour Girls II*), is the stereotypical victim—the innocent, young and sometimes naïve and helpless girl from the developing world like Nigeria.

But one must add, in the final analysis however, that depressing and scandalous as *Italian Connection* seems, there are also crucial moments in the

film where we encounter interesting identity politics by the young women, often resulting in new agency and powerful subjectivities. And I understand precisely how this might seem contradictory to the analysis we have drawn so far to buttress our point about the mistreatment and exploitation of young women in the movie. But the point really, which I have already made in the introduction to the chapter, is that young women may not be as entirely helpless as it appears under very vulnerable conditions. As Hubbard (1999) has argued, people who find themselves in the global sex industry—whether voluntarily, coerced or tricked—"may resist, rework and use their confinement to recast their identities" (180). These are the emancipatory moments, often constructed and negotiated by exploited young women, in which they gain command of both themselves and their environment in very symbolic ways. [13]

So while I do not mean to trivialize the excruciating conditions under which the young women in *Italian Connection* live, we must recognize that there are indeed those who consciously choose this path as a way out of not just dire economic straits but also a stereotypically patriarchal world in which women's freedom and economic independence has remained a problem. So sex work, like every other job, as we see in the movie, has its own risks and challenges. For some it is empowering, for others, it is exploitative, and hence it can both be a "life-line for some" and "a life sentence for others" (Hubbard 8). The young girls who dance, drink and flaunt dollar bills on their bodies in the films perhaps are

[13] There are those who argue that sex work and other modern day erotic care duties are indeed imbued with powerful moments of agency and empowerment (see Danielle Egan 2006; Hubbard 1999; Dank and Refinetti 1999; O' Connell-Davidson 1998; Nagle 1997).

representative of those who consciously choose the path of selling their bodies for purposes of making money to support both themselves and their families. Various studies show that a majority of the women who engage in transnational sex work do so as a means of supporting extended family back in the postcolony (Ejalu 2006; Monzini 2005; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002). A recent World Bank report estimated that in 2008 alone Nigerians abroad remitted approximately $3.3 billion (about N400 billion) to the country, the highest in Sub-Saharan Africa.[14] While this sum includes the remittances of professionals doing legitimate work all over North America and Europe, one may never know how much of this came from the young women who stride the streets and brothels of Europe and North America doing sex work. For some, this is their moment of empowerment in which they can secure for their lives and those of their family those exclusive pleasures of the First World, such as good housing and flashy cars, which their home country may never allow them to even aspire to.

The case of Laura also privileges another insightful moment of subjectivity and agency in this movie. Although she has been tricked into the dark belly of Europe's underworld of sex work and slavery, she is still adamant in spite of the apparent violence and uncertain circumstances in which she finds herself. In spite of her aunt's vehemence and eventual violence, her refusal to capitulate and be exploited under what seems an apparently inescapable circumstance is a symbolic gesture of control over her body, senses and dignity. Although Laura is eventually brutalized and silenced, that moment of violence does not go

[14] "Nigerians abroad remitted N400bn home in one year—World Bank" (Nigerian Tribune, 7th of April, 2008).

unchallenged. As the brothel's thug attempts to touch Laura, she smashes an empty bottle of beer on the thug's head; a sign of resistance to being stampeded into a subservient cultural positioning which she did not consciously choose. The thug, Maureen, and symbolically, the entire global sex market may have succeeded in silencing and disposing of Laura, but while alive, she took control of her body, soul and dignity.

The New Cultural Economy of Sex and Postcolonial 'Collateral Casualties'

Although I have attempted to forge a link between the worldwide popularization of poverty especially amongst women and youth, increased transnational migration by women, and the dramatic rise in sex trafficking, there remains something to be said about how other global cultural transformations in Western societies might account for the new cultural economy of sex that we encounter in *Glamour Girls II*. Rogers Mathews (2008) for example has noted quite interestingly that although social commentators have often identified economic imperatives as the predominant reason for the vulnerability and mass entry of young people into commercial sex work, these analyses do not account for why the recourse to sexual commerce has gained primacy over any other options for most indigent young women. According to Mathews, these analyses do not "explain why women choose to engage in prostitution rather than some other activity, legal or illegal, to earn money" (65).

This gap in the discourse of sex-work—whether national or transnational—requires us to go beyond situated contexts of geographies of sex

work and make broader connections between local commercial sexual cultures such as those represented in *Glamour Girls II* and broader global cultural transformations, especially in Western societies. For as Philip Hubbard (1999) has argued, "the dynamics of the contemporary sex work industry can only be understood in relation to the geographies of (late capitalist or post-modern) western societies, imbued as they are with complex spatialities of power, desire and disgust" (4).[15] Of particular importance here is how this cultural transformation in western sexual cultures has in turn made victims of postcolonial *others*. In this last segment, I will reflect on the debates concerning the transformations of sexuality in the postindustrial western society and attempt to make linkages as to how such transformations might claim other victims—what Zygmunt Bauman (2007) calls "collateral casualties"—from the huge population of young economically disadvantaged women in third-world developing countries such as Nigeria.

One aspect of the bourgeoning sociological work around the rapidity, flux and fluidity associated with postmodern life is in the area of sexuality. And the recent scholarly attention to sexuality in research might initially appear to be an invasion of a somewhat personal domain of desire, love and sex. But as Laumann and others (1994) have argued, our private sexual behaviors and choices have "many public [global] consequences" and hence are deserving of public and intellectual concern and attention (xxvii). At the very heart of some of the most notable studies of contemporary sexuality is how postmodern societies have

[15] Also see Melrose (2000).

begun to witness something of a revolution in the area of sexual cultures in which there is an increasing liberalization of sexual ethics (Giddens 1992; Seidman 1992; Laumann 1994 & 2004). This sexual revolution occurring in western societies in the last two decades or so represents, in the main, for both scholars and the popular public, "a potential realm of freedom, unsullied by the limits of present-day civilization" (Giddens 1).

But the current development of a unique erotic culture in western societies is one that has gone beyond the legitimation of eroticism and public romance as an expression of love, affection, and pleasure, as we witnessed in the mid 1960s all through to the 1980s (See Seidman 1991 & 1992). Not only are we now witnessing the expansion of sexual choice and diversity—new and legitimate sexual lifestyles in the form of gay and lesbian sexualities—but also the sudden release of eroticism into the heart of mainstream global capitalism. Since the 1990s, researchers have begun to identify vast forms of the commercialization of intimacy in the form of sex tourism, lap dancing, stripping, erotic talk, tantra, massage parlous, escort companies, domination/bondage, video webcam sex, telephone sex and many other commercialized forms of intimate and sexual relations (See Bernstein 2001; 2007; Egan 2006; Hochschild 2003; Ryan and Hall 2001; Sanders 2008). The cultural outflow from this is the sudden development of solid "sex careers" and the extraordinary rise in a global sex industry or *markets* where people can generally find sex partners (Laumann et al 8).

This extraordinary social change in sexual ethics, behavior and spaces means that sex, eroticism, affection and intimacy have been released from their

age-old ties with love, reproduction and kinship to a somewhat new domain in which monetary exchange now takes precedence over intimacy. This is what Anthony Giddens (1992) refers to as the shift from "pure love," to "plastic sexuality," where sexuality has been decentered, "freed from the needs of reproduction" (2) into a "new commodity frontier" (Hochschild 30): the domain of global commerce.

Although the blurring of the boundaries between sex and intimacy, and its consequent accreditation as a 'recreational' ethic (Seidman xi) and a commoditized object, has been traced to some motivations in a predominantly masculine world (Sanders 2008),[16] in the main, it can also be linked to large-scale socio-economic and political transformations within the wider western society which have spawned new cultural politics of desire, want, commerce and even power. Of particular importance are the intrinsic individual and collective dislocations of modern-day postindustrial capitalism. The rise of globalization and its attendant emphasis on productivity, efficiency, and profits has meant that more than ever before the growing mass of middle class professionals in western societies must not only be resilient, highly skillful, but also dedicated, willing to put in countless hours of work to perfect skills and initiate profit-spinning ideas. The cultural upshot is the crumbling of family and social tiers. The highly professional men and women who now dominate the western society no longer have the time and energy to invest emotionally and nurture the intimacy that was once associated with age-old love. Devoid of affection and care themselves, the

[16] Sanders (2008) identifies a whole range of motivations that account for men's patronage of sex markets, from the search for variety and power to the elimination of boredom and solitude.

new middle class must turn elsewhere for their own emotional needs whenever they break free from the solitude and boredom associated with postindustrial capitalist work and routine. What we are beginning to see then is the sudden rise in a new political economy of desire in the form of sex markets where love, sex and desire are sold for cash. The new sex markets provide the needed "fantasy world of sexual subservience" and male power that compensates for the "real power deficits" that the new white middle class male experiences while working for giant unconquerable multinational companies (Bernstein 120). They also provide the "reward" and compensation for hard work where the whole exercise becomes part of seeking relief from sex labour (Ryan and Hall 9 & 21). What we are dealing with here then is how the rise of a new postindustrial capitalism and the subsequent rise in "postmodern families peopled by isolable individuals have produced another profound transformation in the erotic sphere" (Bernstein 6).

Of particular significance also is the mass entrance of professional women into the service-oriented global economy. More than ever before, we have begun to witness the extraordinary increase in the rise of new middle/upper class professional women who are striding the globe, and putting in long hours of work as company executives, politicians, academics and other prime public servants. Thus the new professional woman has moved from the bedroom as the primary age-long "caregiver" to the public domain also as makers of money and power. The result is a care deficit in the domestic sphere which a new class of subservient, economically disadvantaged and powerless crop of postcolonial women must fill (Zimmerman et'al 2006; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002).

Glamour Girls II is thus a particular narrative of the new economization order is which globalization, modern cities, a gentrified class, selected spaces of economic opportunities, new movements, and new dynamics in gender, have all conjoined to bring about a new generation of postcolonial "collateral casualties" (Baumann 2007). These postcolonial 'casualties' are now consigned to the servicing of a postmodern sexual culture in which there is not just the normalization of sex but also its commercialization. The young Nigerian (African) girl thus becomes the major victim of emerging postmodern sexual cultures where there has been a shift from procreative intimacies to modern day models of sexuality where Bernstein (2007) argues, "recreational sexuality bears no antagonism to the sphere of public commerce" (7).

Chapter Five

Subjectivity in Times of Cruel Scarcity: Youth, Social Struggle, and the Politics of Culture in Nigerian Video Film

> *What is evident is that something is happening to the contours of people's sense of belonging and that culture is the terrain on which this contestation is being played out. This is true not just of elites in certain parts of the world, but workers, entrepreneurs, consumers, and ordinary people of different ages and backgrounds across the globe.* (Held and Moore 2008: 7)

In recent years, the theme of culture has again taken centre stage in academic discourses both in the social sciences and the humanities, especially as an analytical model for intellectualizing social transformations and their human consequences. Culture, as a people's "whole way of Life" (Williams 1958) is now "a cause of concern" (Held and Moore 1) because emerging scholarship now points to how it has become the primary location for experiencing and responding to the rapid economic, political, social, religious, and technological/scientific transformations associated with modern society (Bennett 2005; Chaney 2002; Held and Moore 2008; Inglis 2005; Tong & Sin-wai 2000; Trend 2007). This "cultural turn," as David Chaney (1994) calls it, suggests that culture has now expanded beyond its normative socializing roles into the domain of power, and how that power is experienced in ordinary social relations. Thus, the reemergence of the discourse of culture as a dominant topic in academic discourse, Chaney (1994) argues, is attributable to its newfound ability to function as the "productive intellectual resource in ways that lead us to rewrite our understanding of life in the modern world" (1). George Yudice (2003) refers to this phenomenon as the new "expediency of culture," and suggests that through

culture, everyday life, especially as lived by different people in different places, is given meaning and social significance.

The new argument about the power of culture implies that 'everyday life' now assumes a new social significance in sociological analysis (Bennett 2005; Inglis 2005). Although 'everyday life,' like most concepts in the social sciences and cultural studies, is notoriously impossible to define in very precise or absolute terms (Featherstone 1995), scholars now use the phrase in referring to the often "taken-for-granted aspects of daily life," and how such routine daily human experiences interrelate with the terrain of power and social contestations (Bennett 2005). 'Everyday life' is now significant because it is said to contain, and is able to reflect, the influence or power of wider social structures that are often unassociated with quotidian life. In other words, it typically hints at the interplay between what Andy Bennett refers to as "culture" and "structure." As David Inglis (2005) has argued, to understand everyday life, "beyond seeing it just as an assemblage of dull unremarkable activities, we have to understand how wider society and social structures make it the way it is for different sorts of people" (4). Society is constituted not only by people within it, but also by social structures such as institutions and systems, and these, in many ways, define the human lives within that specific social order.

Thus, more than ever before, scholars now argue, it is in the regular 'everyday' lives of people that political, economic, technological, scientific, religious, educational and health policies play out, as these are all social structures that contour and define everyday life. For instance, in the context of the current

global economic melt-down, it is in people's homelessness, joblessness, intolerable sufferings and deaths that we come to witness and recognize the consequences of global economic recession, not in government bailout plans or the rhetoric of politicians. Likewise, it is in the freedom and justice experienced by people (or otherwise) that democracy is being felt, understood and responded to. So although there continues to be a proliferation of sociological thoughts on the peculiarity of [post]modern society and the new social practices that accompany the rapid social shifts associated with it, in the main, these new insights, as Held and Moore (2008) note:

> are always the product of a complex interplay between the professional *social science imagination and the everyday experiences and practices of ordinary individuals*, as well as the management, development and transformation of institutions and markets by government, business, elites, policy makers and others. (2, emphasis mine)

This revelation suggests that the cultural province is not innocent but the most poignant location and force in the signification of social meanings such as consent, disapproval, angst, civic [dis]obedience, nationalism, happiness, and all kinds of human sentiments, especially in relation to social institutions and trends, whether at a global or local level.

The "politicization of culture," as Henrietta Moore (2008) frames it, implies that the cultural sphere is now not only the primary place for the construction of social meanings, but also the nodal point for framing identity politics, especially in relation to questions of belonging (Lipid & Kratochwil

1996). As people, irrespective of age, race, and nationality are sculpted by social structures, they generally tend to react in unique ways depending on whether they feel a sense of belonging or exclusion. According to Sheila Croucher (2004), the politics of belonging essentially refers to "the processes of individuals, groups, societies, and polities defining, negotiating, promoting, rejecting, violating, and transcending boundaries…[especially to] perceived material and psychological need to belong" (41). All over the world, from Georgia, Ukraine and Russia, through the Middle East, United States, Western Europe, and Sub-Saharan Africa, we are witnessing intense cultural crisis in the public domain in the form of social conflicts. These social vituperations are, in the main, associated with people's threatened sense of legitimate attachment or belonging to certain economic, political, religious or cultural territories.

It is perhaps for this reason that Croucher argues that not only is the negotiation of cultural belonging real, it is "quintessentially political" (41). It is connected to the ways in which people are experiencing their immediate environments in relation to both local and global social forces. And cultural belonging, and the identities politics associated with it, is fundamentally mutable, adapting to shifting socio-economic, political, cultural and even technological/scientific conditions, such that people's politics of belonging are never static. As varied social transformations animate different challenges and fracture people's sense of attachment to different places and structures in diverse ways, there are also new cultural negotiations by people that seek to reinvent felt circumstances and reposition the self within emerging social change that either

threatens or consolidates people's sense of belonging. Identity transformations thus are not mutually isolable. They are always in relation to something else that threatens people's sense of being. According to Croucher, "an individual's or group's identity always emerges in relation to others and in the context of specific opportunities and constraints" (40). So that the vast cultural crisis that we are now witnessing all over the world, amongst both young and old, especially those living on the margins of society, are, in some ways, connected to the particular ways in which people's everyday lives are being impacted upon, often negatively, by unequal global or local socio-economic and political forces.

What then is the significance of the politicization of culture for youth? Or as Sharon Stephens has asked:

> How do new forms of international and local politics of culture affect children [and youth]? And how do children [and youth] themselves experience, understand, and perhaps resist or reshape the complex, frequently contradictory cultural politics that inform their daily lives? (1)

Arjun Appadurai (2008) offers a clue that is particularly relevant to the discourse of culture, especially with regards to youth and their concern with futurity. In response to the question: "why does culture matter?" he responded:

> [t]he answer is that it is in culture that ideas of the future [the main province of youth], as much as those of the past, are embedded and nurtured. Thus, in strengthening the capacity to aspire, conceived as a cultural capacity, especially among the poor, the future-oriented logic of development could find a natural ally, and the poor could find the

resources required to contest and alter the conditions of their own poverty. (29)

In the face of an extraordinary postmodern/postcolonial historical civilization in which rapid social transformation has become the order of the day, bringing about an unstable society marked by uncertainty, unpredictability and high risk, culture is the new province through which many enact their aspirations towards futurity. Owing to heightened interdependence across the world, the global economy is now not only shaky but notoriously unreliable. In spite of the popularization of neo-liberalism and democracy and its promissory notes, we have continued to witness global instances of both economic and social injustices. Also, global transformations in science and technology have radicalized the everyday lives of people all over the world, ushering in new dimensions and spaces of culture (Featherstone and Lash 1999). Nothing is certain anymore, and as a consequence, there is now much discussion of the high prices which young people all over the world must pay as both their "bodies and minds become the terrain for adult battles" (Sharon vii).

In the face of huge global economic, cultural and political transformations, most often in very unpleasant ways, childhoods have not only disappeared, the futures of youth are now at stake—threatened and [often times] compromised. Taken together, not only are young people at risk globally, they are, by their new cultures, considered to be risk itself (Macdonald et al. 1993; Cieslik & Pollock 2002; Wulff 1995; Stephens 1995). As these things take shape, young people are beginning to feel a pinch in their 'everyday lives' too—in the family, school, city,

community, and work. As life becomes intolerably difficult for young people everyday, they too have begun to find ways, in their daily routine of living, to address the difficulties that modern society now poses. This is what I refer to as a new subjectivity in times of cruel scarcity. As the new electronic economy cum invisible global finance markets increasingly eliminate those without the requisite social capital to participate in its somewhat esoteric backyards; as governments and public institutions everywhere become increasingly indifferent to the futures of their youth; as unemployment and underemployment rates amongst youth continue to soar; as young women continue to experience a patriarchal world with unequal opportunities for all; and as media globalization has democratized both media technology and images all over the world, what we have begun to see is a radical transformation in the cultures of young people. Youth and their cultures are now actively implicated in the new discourse of the "politicization of culture" where the cultural domain now offers youth a new terrain for demonstrating different subjectivities and new forms of agency.

And as culture and 'everyday life' have gained a new force for young and old, their representation in different media—film, television, literature, paintings, music, and other forms of cultural representations—have also assumed new discursive force. As Douglas Kellner argues, "images, sounds and spectacles help produce the fabric of everyday life, dominating leisure time, shaping political views and social life, and providing the material out of which people forge their everyday identities" (Cited in Schechter 99). Cultural media are not only said to have important roles in the construction of social identities, but also the abilities

to offer representations of cultural identities especially "with regards to their sources of authorization, wherever these may come from" (Gentz and Kramer 1). Technologies of cultural representation in the form of mass media and new digital technologies now shape our understanding of the world we live in. According to Held and Moore:

> [w]hat media technologies do offer is an expanded domain of symbolic production, new forms and power of representation and transmission that have an impact on how we envision ourselves, our connections and our communities. (8)

In the face of this new power of cultural representations, popular culture has not only become the new sphere of collective social memory, but also a powerful means for youth to document social experience. Popular culture, enabled mostly by new digital media, now offers the experiences and voices of those from the periphery such as women, youth and children, precisely those cut off from the mainstream of the new global economic order.

It is precisely for this reason that this research project has taken on the subject matter of youth in Nigeria's popular video culture. Earlier on [see chapter one], I made the point that several scholars now also conceive and rationalize the Nigerian video film tradition as an emerging form of Africa's popular culture (See Okome 1999; Okome and Haynes 2000; Haynes 2000; Ogundele 2000; Adejunmobi 2002; Adesokan 2004).[1] Nollywood, most of these critics argue, undertakes the same cultural role that earlier popular art forms such as chapbooks

[1] See section three in chapter one

(Onitsha Market Literature), popular theatre (Yoruba Travelling Theatre), Afro (Juju) music and many other urban cultural expressions played for local audiences in Nigeria in bygone days. And the precise social significance of popular culture in Africa, as scholars note, has to do with the ways in which it orients itself to addressing the collective social concerns of local addressees. At the very core of the social/cultural function of African popular culture thus is the extraordinary ways in which its producers, through their texts, speak to "local audiences about pressing concerns, experiences and struggles that they share" (Barber 1997a: 02).

And it would seem to me that the reference to the 'popular' in African popular culture and its association with the 'collective' social 'concerns' of the people, also means that its power rests precisely in its ability to engage not only with the exclusive social experience of a selected few but with the quotidian 'everyday lives' of common people, both in rural and urban settings, where survival, anxiety and fear has become the dominant social realty of postcolonial life. Its prioritization of the popular—the collective and ordinary—over anything else also means that as creative texts, the video films, like prior popular culture forms in Nigeria, privilege enormous and significant meanings about the unique cultural politics which David Trend (2007) argues, is associated, though often [un]discerned, with our common daily experiences. The true anthropological value of the video film to the popular public then, especially for youth, is that it portrays the quotidian everyday life experiences of common people and the peculiar postcolonial challenges that come with them. Das Veena (1995) has illustrated this power of popular culture with his study of a local soap opera in

postcolonial India. He demonstrates how *Hum Log*, a popular TV soap adapted from the Mexican *Telenovelas* of the 1970s, assumed an entirely new societal function in Indian society. In spite of arguments about its hyperbolization of reality, Veena unraveled how *Hum Log*, as a fictional performance of everyday life, functioned actively "as a cultural experience which links life on the tele-screen with the domestic life of the viewers" (178). Very crucial in this dynamic of cultural representation and its audiences is "credibility" and not "truth," for clearly, the audience understood that these stories were not true. The key thing is the correlation between the created cultural form and the world it offers and the real cultural experiences of its audiences. This, indeed, is also the case with the Nigerian video films. Their power lies precisely in the proximity between the stories of the daily life struggles of ordinary people which they represent and the ordinary social experiences of their viewers.

Thus, in this research project, I have argued that the Nigerian video films, as a particular kind of popular cinematic practice within a global film culture, offer us significant meanings and insights about the social experiences of young people. The particular trajectory of the project has been its focus on the human dimensions of persistent economic and political crises in Nigeria, especially as they affect youth. Not only have I suggested that the video film culture is a unique cinematic practice within a specific postcolonial cultural setting [Nigeria], but also that, as new cultural texts, the films tell us something about the enormous social struggles of young people in the face of really daunting postcolonial political and economic crises. We have examined a whole range of visual

narratives ranging from fashion and agency in *Face of Africa* to unemployment and the rise of a ritual economy in *Living in Bondage*; from crumbled postcolonial polities and state insecurity in *Issakaba* to an urban housing crisis and government gentrification initiatives in *Maroko*; and the global feminization of poverty and the development of new sexual commerce in *Glamour Girls*. In all of these narratives, we have seen how young people are now engaged in multiple social struggles in the face of overwhelming socio-economic and political changes in contemporary Nigeria. These cultural representations are indeed important for they provide us the hidden social transcripts of contemporary youth experience which no other cultural form may offer. And I believe strongly that these popular culture representations deserve serious attention because they may ultimately provide the real saving grace for fixing an endangered and troubled postcolonial civilization that has for decades been marked by the restlessness of its youth.

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